

Wiped out

by liveonpurpose

Category: H2O: Just Add Water

Language: English

Characters: Rikki C., Zane B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2011-09-01 16:28:38

Updated: 2012-07-20 09:34:13

Packaged: 2016-04-26 11:54:42

Rating: T

Chapters: 21

Words: 41,306

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Zane gets in a biking accident and loses his memory. Unable to remember the last few years, Rikki tries to help him regain his memory. But will he be the same? Will he keep her secret? Set after season 3

1. The accident

Zane Bennett sat alone on the dock, waiting for his girlfriend, Rikki, to join him. As he sat there, his feet dangling above the water, he thought back to the first time he'd ever met her. And the first time he'd ever liked her. They were very different occasions.

Zane smiled to himself as he thought back on their history together. It read like a bad soap opera. They had hated each other from the very beginning. Looking back, Zane couldn't really put a finger on when that had all changed. But somehow, gradually, they had realized that they had more in common than they had thought. They got each other.

They'd been through more up and downs together than anyone he knew. They fought with the best of them, but making up made the fighting worth it. Zane knew that he was going to be with Rikki forever. And he couldn't wait to get started.

"Zane!" A high-pitched voice called out.

Disappointed, Zane reluctantly turned around. He knew that voice. It was Sophie. Sophie was Will's sister, and was instrumental in the majority of the fights he and Rikki had been having that year. She had been his manager at the cafe until he realized what she was up to. He'd fired her right after the graduation celebration that year.

"That's me," He said unenthusiastically.

"Hey!" Sophie began perkily, as if she'd never done a thing wrong in her life. "So, I have this absolutely fantastic business opportunity for you to look at-"

"Not interested." Zane cut her off.

"Not interested? You will be once you hear-" Sophie tried to continue.

"NOT. Interested." Zane was firm. He'd had enough of Sophie's business opportunities.

"You don't even want to hear about-"

"No." Zane turned back to the water.

"Well I'm just going to leave this here with you, in case you change your mind." Sophie plunked down a folder full of brochures beside Zane. She started to leave.

"You know," she said, turning back around towards Zane, "You used to jump at a good business deal. What's changed?"

The answer to her question came walking down the dock at that moment. Rikki looked beautiful, as usual, though her face darkened when she saw Sophie there.

Sophie saw Rikki coming towards her. "Gotta get going!" She called as she walked past Rikki and back up towards the cafe to meet Will.

Rikki waited for Sophie to disappear before turning her attention towards Zane, a huge smile on her face. Zane stood and pulled Rikki in for a long kiss. They'd broken up for a short bit of time last month (mostly because of Sophie) and ever since they reunited it was as if they were brand new crushes.

Eventually the two broke the kiss and walked hand in hand up the dock and towards a restaurant. Tonight was date night. No Bella or Cleo, no Nate, no mermaids, no stress. Just the two of them. They'd made it a point to have one night to themselves a week, and they found that it really brought them closer together.

The two sat at a candle-lit table. They'd enjoyed a nice dinner together and were sharing an ice cream sundae as dessert. It had been a wonderfully relaxing evening for the pair. They'd shared stories with each other, they'd made plans to go to the summer dance next week, they'd even gotten a little mushy (though neither would ever admit it.) At the end of the meal Zane paid the bill and walked with Rikki outside and along the beach. They made light conversation with each other as Zane walked Rikki to her home. They stopped outside her door.

"Do you girls need more help tomorrow?" Zane asked. Rikki, Bella, and Cleo had been spending much of their free time attempting to clean up and repair the moon pool. The pool had been damaged when Sophie had decided to mine for the rare gems found in the cave walls. Zane had played a part in the destruction, and he felt terrible for it.

"No, I think we'll be fine." Rikki said. "At this point there isn't

much we can do anyways."

"Ah." Was all Zane said.

The two stood on Rikki's front step, their arms wrapped around one another. Zane lifted Rikki's chin with one finger and bent in for a kiss. The kiss was long and passionate. Finding herself short on breath, Rikki eventually pulled back.

"We should stop." She whispered.

"I know." Zane whispered back.

Rikki made herself take a step backwards towards the door, away from Zane. She stood there, still, for a moment looking at him. Reaching out, she took his hands in hers and pulled him towards her. Her back against the door, Zane pinned her roughly with another kiss. This time it was several minutes before they parted. Both were flushed.

"I'd better be going," Zane breathed, his eyes still closed.

Rikki opened her front door and took a step inside, not turning away from Zane.

"Thank you," She said. "For being such a great guy. You've changed a lot over the years."

Zane chuckled, he'd been thinking about the exact same thing just earlier that day.

"Changed for good." He said, looking into Rikki's eyes

"Goodnight." Rikki said quietly, closing the door slowly behind her.

Rikki leaned against the closed door, happily reliving that wonderful night. She had never been as relaxed with someone as she found herself with Zane.

Zane walked home through the darkness. What an amazing night. And what an amazing girl.

The next morning Rikki, Bella, and Cleo dove into the water to swim out to Mako Island. It had taken a lot of time and hard work, but the island was finally starting to come together. The boys, (Zane, Will, and Lewis) had helped a great bit with the heavy lifting, but now clean up consisted mostly of sweeping endless debris.

Zane was headed out to race motocross bikes with his friend Nate. The pair had been friends since childhood and had been riding bikes together just as long. Nate didn't really understand why Zane was all of a sudden a 'nice' guy, but he didn't worry about it too much. After all, nothing much had changed between the two of them.

They had been racing the course for an hour and were sweaty and exhausted. They decided to take a break and walked their bikes over to the cooler of drinks at the side of the track.

At that very moment, an out of control rider came speeding across the

track. He sped straight where Zane and Nate were walking. The rider was a novice, and he'd been going way too fast to make a turn he'd attempted.

"Look out!" Someone from the stands shouted out.

Zane looked up just in time to see the bike flying towards them as if in slow motion. Grabbing Nate by the shoulders, he shoved him out of the way as hard as he possibly could. Nate landed safely a few feet away.

The bike hit Zane hard, cracking into his ribs and causing him to fly backwards. Zane had removed his helmet after getting off his bike and he landed heavily. His head hit the pavement with a sickening thud. After rolling twice more Zane ended flat on his back, completely unconscious.

Zane was loaded into an ambulance within minutes and rushed to the hospital. He had not regained consciousness yet and was being worked on by a team of medics to stop the bleeding from multiple cuts on his face. Upon arriving at the hospital he was rushed to the ER.

Rikki's phone rang just as the girls were getting ready to head back home for the day. She picked it up with a confused look on her face.

"It's Zane's dad," She said as she opened the phone.

Cleo and Bella shrugged and continued packing things up for the day.

"What?" Rikki shouted in shock. "I'll be right there." Rikki clicked the phone shut, dropping the bag of cleaning supplies she'd been holding.

"What is it?" Bella asked quickly. Rikki's face had turned completely white.

"Zane's been hurt." Rikki said quickly. She dove into the water without even a look back at the other girls and took off towards shore. All she could think about was Zane.

Bella and Cleo took off after her, but Rikki was swimming so quickly they couldn't even keep up.

Rikki ran into the hospital in a total panic. She looked around desperately until she spotted Harrison Bennett pacing at the end of a hall.

"Where is he?" Rikki asked, completely winded.

"In there." Harrison nodded towards a room across from them.

Rikki tried to look in the window of the door but couldn't see Zane. "What happened? Is he ok?"

"Biking accident of some sort." Harrison said tiredly. "They think he's going to be fine. He has a few broken ribs, but at least he's regained consciousness. The thing is, he hit his head so hard the doctors are worried he might have-"

Just then a young nurse opened the door to Zane's room. "He's doing well." She said with a smile. "I think he can stand to have just a couple visitors. It'll be good for him."

Weak with relief, Rikki breezed past the nurse and into the room. Harrison followed quickly behind her.

Zane laid in a hospital bed, hooked up to numerous machines. His head was wrapped in gauze. He looked over as Rikki and Harrison entered the room.

"Don't say anything just yet." Harrison reached the bed first. "Just get some rest."

"I'm feeling much better." Zane said in a low voice. Harrison gestured for him to stop speaking.

"Zane, I am so glad you're ok." Harrison said gruffly. "Don't you EVER scare me like that again, you hear me?"

Zane nodded.

Harrison stepped back, letting Rikki stand next to the bed.

"Zane?" Rikki had tears in her eyes. She had been so incredibly scared for him.

Zane met her eyes. "Yes?"

Rikki bent in and gave him the lightest kiss on the lips. As she stood up Zane had a puzzled look on his face.

"And who are you?" Zane asked.

2. Nothing

Rikki couldn't put her thoughts into words. She stood there, at Zane's bedside, frozen.

"It's me?" Rikki said quietly. "Are you joking?"

Zane's vacant and confused expression answered her question. He was looking at her as if he'd never laid eyes on each other before. As if he couldn't even remember last night.

"Dad?" Zane beckoned for his father to come to his bedside.

Rikki stepped backwards wordlessly.

At that moment a nurse came bustling in the room. Rikki ran to her.

"He doesn't remember me." Rikki said anxiously.

"Ah..." The nurse pursed her lips. "We were worried there might be some cranial damage.."

"Cranial damage!" Rikki interrupted. "What kind of cranial damage?"

Amnesia?"

"Let me get his doctor for you." The nurse left the room quickly.

A few minutes later a tall man wearing a white jacket entered. He crossed to Harrison with Rikki at his heels, listening.

"Mr. Bennett," He started. "Zane has some severe swelling in his brain. We do believe that it will go down on it's own, but he's going to need to take it easy these next few months."

"And the memory loss?" Harrison asked.

"Well, for now it seems to be only partial. He remembers you, Mr. Bennett, and he remembers his name and other basic facts about his life. We'll need to run a few more tests but it appears that he's only lost about the last 5-10 years or so." The doctor made a note on Zane's chart. "He should be able to go home within a week, we'll want to monitor both the swelling and his memory."

"When will he get it back?" Rikki couldn't keep quiet any longer.

The doctor turned to her. "Brain injuries are tricky things," He said gently. "It could be tomorrow or... he may never regain his memories at all. Though, in most cases, we're probably looking at a two month recovery time."

Rikki's breath left her, she sank down into one of the chairs along the wall.

"What do we do for him?" Harrison asked.

"Surround him with familiar things," The doctor told him. "Friends, activities, things he enjoys doing. Especially things he's enjoyed during the last few years."

As the doctor spoke, Cleo, Bella, Nate, and Lewis appeared in the doorway.

"For the time being I think it would be better if all of us," The doctor looked pointedly at the group in the doorway, "Let Zane get some rest." The doctor gave Zane's IV a shot of something clear and within seconds Zane was asleep.

Rikki and Harrison were ushered into the hall with the rest of everyone.

Harrison thanked everyone for coming and announced that he would be back first thing in the morning. The rest of the group huddled around Rikki, asking questions and comforting her. Rikki explained what had happened.

"He's going to be ok." Rikki said. The room collectively sighed in relief. Bella pulled Rikki into a tight hug, but Rikki wasn't smiling.

"Rikki?" Cleo noticed that Rikki still seemed miserable. "What is it?"

"He doesn't remember me." Rikki whispered.

The group exchanged concerned looks with one another.

"You mean-" Lewis started.

"He has some swelling in his brain, he is having trouble remembering the last five years or so." Rikki said tiredly. "That means he'll know you, Cleo, and you too, Lewis."

"And me!" Nate said a little too happily. He instantly changed his face back to a sad one, for Rikki's sake.

"Yeah, and you." Rikki hadn't even noticed his happy tone. "But not Bella, and... not me."

They all tried to comfort Rikki, but she was inconsolable.

"Well guys, it's late, I'm sorry but I've really got to run." Nate said. "My mom'll be wondering where I am. Anyone need a ride?"

"I'm staying." Rikki sat in one of the waiting room chairs. "I want to be here when Zane wakes up."

"We're staying with you." Cleo said, sitting next to her.

Bella and Lewis took the next two seats. They promised to call Nate if anything happened.

The hours passed painfully slowly. Lewis and Bella nodded off sometime around 2am. Cleo managed to stay awake until 3:30 before she also fell asleep, leaning on Lewis. Rikki didn't let her eyes close. Too many thoughts were running through her head.

Zane didn't remember. That meant he didn't remember their secret. He knew nothing of mermaids, or full moons, or anything. Rikki thought back to the Zane she had met 3 years ago. He was mean, cold, and self-serving. What if that Zane was back?

No, Rikki convinced herself. Just because his memory is gone, that doesn't mean his personality will be any different. Right? Everything will be back to normal in no time at all.

The hall was deserted because of the late hour. Rikki stood quietly and walked to Zane's door. Looking up and down the hall to make sure no one was coming, Rikki silently opened the door and slipped inside.

Careful not to make a sound, Rikki walked over and sat in the chair beside Zane's bed. She rested her head next to Zane's arm and was sound asleep within minutes.

"Hey, you there. Hello?"

Rikki awoke suddenly. To her surprise, Zane was awake, and looking at her with a disgusted look on his face.

"Good you're awake." He sneered. "Now would you mind letting me have the bed to myself? I didn't sign up for a bunk mate."

Rikki sat up, surprised. "Sorry," she muttered as she stood. She turned to walk to the door but stopped herself and forced herself to turn back to Zane. Zane was still looking at her without smiling, waiting for her to leave.

"Well?" he raised his eyebrows at her.

"Zane..." Rikki started. She didn't know what to say but she felt like she had to talk to him.

"Listen, whoever you are, I don't know if you've noticed, but I'm in a bit of pain. So if you'll do me a solid and head out that would be fantastic." Zane said sarcastically.

Rikki nodded. At that moment a nurse came into the room carrying a tray of food. She stopped when she saw Rikki.

"Young lady, visiting hours don't start until 9am, you aren't supposed to be in here." She said sternly.

"I know," Rikki said quietly. She looked at Zane one more time before leaving the room.

Zane didn't know who the blonde was, but he had been more than a little freaked out when he'd woken up with her sound asleep in the chair next to his bed. Who does that?

"Here you are, hun." The nurse set the tray on the bedside table.

"I'm not hungry." Zane said flatly.

"Well you really should try to eat something, it'll make you stronger." The nurse said, pouring him a glass of orange juice.

"What part of 'I'm not hungry' don't you understand?" Zane said snidely. "Take it away."

The nurse gave him a look but picked up the tray and left the room.

Zane assessed his injuries. He could move, but it was painful. His ribs were in a lot of pain. His head was tender, but manageable. He wanted out of the hospital.

Zane's doctor came through the door with his charts and a folder of xrays. "Awake already?" He said conversationally.

"It would appear that way." Zane said. "How much longer do I need to stay here?"

"That's what I've come in to talk to you about." The doctor put up the xrays as he spoke. "You'll most likely be able to head home in a couple days. We need to keep you here until the swelling in your brain subsides."

"Swelling?" Zane asked.

"Yes, that's what's causing the memory loss." The doctor walked to

Zane's bed side.

"Right." Zane furrowed his brow as he remembered the conversation yesterday. The doctor had asked him question after question. They said he couldn't remember the last 5 or 6 years. Whoa.

"Get some rest, I'll be back in a bit to run a few tests." The doctor made a note on Zane's chart before heading out.

Right. Rest. Zane thought to himself bitterly. He couldn't remember his life and the doctor wanted him to just lay there.

Lewis, Cleo, and Bella were outside the door when Rikki left Zane's room. They had all been worried when they'd woken up to find Rikki gone.

Rikki didn't say anything, she just sat in a chair in the waiting room. She waited there for the next two days and nights, only going home for a bit at a time to shower and eat a little. Lewis, Cleo, and Bella took shifts staying with her. They were worried about both Rikki and Zane. Rikki didn't try to go back into Zane's room. Nate had been in, and she'd listened to the two laughing and joking with one another.

"He seems normal to me." Nate had said as he left.

Finally the day came when Zane was to be released. His father filled out a stack of paperwork and led Zane down the hall.

"That weird blonde is still here," Zane muttered to his dad. There she was, still sitting outside his room like a stalker.

"Rikki?" Harrison asked.

"I dunno." Zane shrugged.

Harrison had been given strict instructions not to overload Zane with information.

"She's a nice girl," was all he said. He would give it a few days before trying to explain more to him.

3. Deja vu

Zane was thrilled to walk in his own front door. Thrilled, but exhausted. He had been under strict instructions to get as much sleep as possible, and that was just fine with him.

"I'm headed upstairs, think I'll catch a nap." Zane told his dad as he walked slowly and painfully to the staircase.

Zane pushed open the door to his room and stood in the doorway, taken aback. This wasn't his room. His room had slate gray walls with black trim. And his bed had a black metal frame with a deep scarlet comforter. No, this was not his room. Zane stepped in and turned a circle, looking around. This room was painted a deep blue. The wooden-framed bed had a chestnut colored bedspread.

Zane walked to the closet and pulled the double doors open. There,

inside, were a lot of clothes. Frowning, Zane pushed the clothes aside to see all the way in the back. Hanging was his graduation robe from middle school. This was his room, all right.

Zane turned back to the room. On the bedside table sat his alarm clock that he'd had since he was 9, and a picture in a white frame. He'd never seen that picture before in his life.

Zane picked it up and turned it over in his hands.

"To Zane" was written on the back in blue marker.

Zane looked at the picture in the frame. He held it up close to his face. It was him. He was standing on the beach holding hands with... Zane held the picture even closer to his eyes... the blonde girl from the hospital. Zane looked at the picture a long time before setting it back down on the table. His head was pounding. Zane climbed into his bed and slept all the way until the next morning. His sleep was filled with strange dreams. He was swimming, then he was kissing the blonde girl, then he was swimming again. When he awoke the next morning he wouldn't remember any of it.

Rikki knew that Zane was at home. She'd been calling every hour, only to be told by Harrison that Zane was sleeping. Rikki had also been instructed not to overload Zane with information. She was dying to see him.

The next morning Rikki got a phone call telling her that Zane was awake. In under 5 minutes she was out the door and on her way to his house.

She rang the doorbell and stood nervously on the front step. Harrison opened the door holding a briefcase.

"Hey, Rikki. I'm just headed to a quick meeting. Lots to catch up on. He's just in there." With that Harrison headed out the door.

Rikki stepped through the door shyly. She peered through the all way into the living room. She could see Zane stretched out on the couch watching television.

"Hey," Rikki said as she stepped into the living room.

Zane looked up briefly from the tv. "Hey," he answered.

Zane picked up the remote and turned the tv off. He looked at the blonde girl, Rikki. She was pretty. But he didn't feel anything when he looked at her.

"So..." Zane started. "My dad says we date?"

Rikki sat on the far corner of the couch. "We do," She managed.

"Mmmm." Zane said, looking at his feet.

The pair sat in uncomfortable silence while Zane prepared what he was going to say next.

"Listen, ah, Rikki, right? I've got a bit on my plate right now. I

really don't need to be worrying about, you know, relationship stuff." Zane looked at her with unconcerned eyes.

"Zane," Rikki started. "You just have to remember. You do, we're," Rikki thought hard about how to finish that sentence. "We're good together."

"But I don't know you?" Zane said, raising his shoulders.

"You do." Rikki said hurriedly. "You know me better than anyone else, and I know you. You're scared of heights. You hate olives, you broke your arm when you were 8 years old because you fell out of a tree." Rikki moved closer to him on the couch. She reached out and took his hand. "We've been together a long time." She said quietly. "I know all your secrets and... and you know mine too."

"What secrets?" Zane asked. "I mean, you seem to know so much about me, shouldn't we make this conversation fair?"

"Umm..." Rikki knew she couldn't tell him about the big secret, the mermaid secret. He didn't know her, there was nothing to keep him from telling someone. She racked her brain for something to tell him.

"I... I am scared of the dark." She settled on.

Zane snickered. "Hell of a secret." He said sarcastically. Truth was, he was incredibly shaken. This girl literally knew everything about him and she was a stranger. He was freaked out and he didn't like it.

"I think you should go." Zane said as he clicked the tv back on. He tried to pull his hand out of Rikki's but she held him tight.

"I think I shouldn't." She said firmly. "Your dad is gone and you don't need to be here alone. Want to walk down by the beach?" Rikki was determined. She was going to make him remember her. They spent a lot of time on the beach, maybe it would be enough to jog his memory.

Zane opened his mouth to answer 'no' but stopped. He did want to get out of the house. And this girl was beautiful, in a quirky kind of way. Plus, she was supposed to be his girlfriend.

"Ok." He said, surprising Rikki.

Rikki's heart jumped. This was great!

Rikki stood and helped Zane off the couch. He was walking well, he just couldn't bend or twist too much.

"Guess we'll have to cancel our dancing plans." Rikki joked.

Zane laughed without meaning to. Something about this girl made him... happy? He couldn't put a finger on it.

The two walked out to the beach across from Zane's house. They didn't talk as they walked.

"I'm not going out in the water, I don't want to get my bandages wet."

Zane told her.

"That's fine with me." Rikki answered, relieved. At least she wouldn't have to worry about that.

They spread out a blanket and sat beside each other as they looked out over the water.

"So..." Zane started. "You say we've been together a long time. How long?"

"Off and on for about three years now." Rikki looked at him.

"Off and on?" Zane raised his eyebrows. "How good can we be together if we kept breaking up?"

"Well we've only broken up twice," Rikki explained. "And both times it was for good reasons."

"Which are?" Zane pushed.

Rikki thought hard about how to answer him. The truth was that the first time she had broken up right after Zane had found out she was a mermaid. She could hardly tell him that. The second time it was because she saw him kiss Sophie.

"Well," Rikki decided to just tell him about the second one. "We broke up because I saw you kissing someone. Someone who wasn't me."

This surprised Zane. It wasn't like he considered himself flawless, and his moral compass didn't always point due north, but he'd never been a cheater.

"Who?" He asked.

"Doesn't matter." Rikki said. "It turns out she was making moves on you, but you were never interested in her at all."

It felt weird to have someone else tell him how he had felt. Especially when he didn't remember it.

"Ok." Zane processed what she'd said. "And we got back together after that?"

Rikki nodded, "Yeah, maybe a month later. We couldn't stay apart." She smiled and looked down at the ground.

"You said we broke up twice?" What about the other time?" Zane wasn't letting this go.

Rikki really didn't know how to explain. "You've heard a lot today. Maybe we should head in? You could probably use a rest."

She was right. Zane found himself incredibly tired. And his head was hurting again. The pair stood, Rikki folded the blanket. Zane started towards the house.

"Wait." Rikki made him pause. "I just want to try something."

Rikki walked up to him purposely. She was determined to do this. It worked in fairy tales, after all.

Rikki took Zane's face in her hands and raised hers up. She pressed her lips on his, kissing him gently. She closed her eyes and let herself forget about everything for just a second.

Rikki pulled back, carefully examining Zane's expression. His eyes were still closed from the kiss. Slowly he opened them. He was having the strangest feeling of déjà vu. He'd been here before, and he'd kissed this girl before. A rush of feelings almost surfaced, but vanished before he could make heads or tails of it. He couldn't even remember what he'd just been thinking about.

"Anything?" Rikki whispered.

Zane shook his head no. Shrugging his shoulders he turned to walk in the house. "Listen, uh, Rikki, look, I'm sorry. I'm just not feeling anything. Sorry," Zane said halfheartedly as he walked into the house.

Rikki was still determined. She would make him remember. She had to.

4. The box

Zane shut the front door firmly behind him. He stood there, leaning on the door, for several seconds. He was breathing hard and his head was pounding. He was feeling all kinds of emotions he couldn't explain. He felt a weird connection with Rikki, but he didn't feel anything romantic towards her. It freaked him out that she knew so much about him. He didn't like being told how he had felt. As much as she told him that he loved her and that they were good together as a couple, Zane just couldn't believe it. He was weirded out and he didn't want to hear any more.

The doorbell rang, startling him. He winced as his ribs gave a sharp pang of pain. He pulled open the door, ready to tell Rikki to just go home and to stop bothering him. But it wasn't Rikki at the door.

A short girl with bright red hair stood on his front step. Zane looked at her carefully, but she wasn't anyone he remembered.

"And you are..." Zane started.

"Sophie." The red head held out her hand. "You don't remember me but we are very good friends." She spoke confidently.

"Are we?" Zane shook her hand.

"Yup." Sophie looked behind him into the house. "Can I come in?"

"Uh, sure." Zane stepped aside to let her in the house. "Why are you here?"

Sophie looked at him confusedly. "Oh, that's right, your memory. Well Zane, you and I were in the middle of negotiations for an excellent business opportunity. You know, before the accident. Sorry to hear

about that, by the way."

Zane took a couple steps closer to her. "So... we're business partners?"

"Among other things." Sophie smiled coyly.

Zane was completely confused. He had been told that Rikki was his girlfriend, but this red-haired girl was definitely implying that they had something going on as well.

"I've had a rough day." Zane said. "You should go. We'll talk later."

"But I've just gotten here?" Sophie raised her eyebrows.

"Yeah. I know. Sorry, I'm going to get some rest." Zane opened the door and waited for Sophie to walk to it.

"I'll be seeing you soon." Sophie smiled. She gave him a peck on the cheek and strutted away.

Now Zane's head was really throbbing. He was hearing too many things about his life and he didn't know what to make of it. Even though it was still early afternoon, he climbed into his bed and slept soundly until the next day.

Rikki spent most of the night looking for things to help Zane remember. She found pictures, yearbooks, handwritten notes... anything she thought might make him remember her.

Rikki waited as long as she could stand the next morning before picking up the box and heading on her way to Zane's. She knocked on the door and waited impatiently for someone to answer.

It was Zane who came to the door. His hair was tousled and he was still in his sweats. "Oh, it's you." He said unenthusiastically.

"Yes, it's me." Rikki was determined to be positive. "I've brought things to help you."

"What is it?" Zane tried to peer into the box.

"Come on, follow me." Rikki carried the box past him and straight up the stairs. She plopped it down on Zane's bed and took a seat beside it.

Zane followed her and stood in the doorway. Rikki was sitting on his bed comfortably. Zane took a seat on the far end. He wasn't sure if he was up to another day of trying to remember his life, but he was curious to see what she'd brought with her.

"Ok." Rikki reached into the box and pulled out a photo album. "Here is a collection of all of our pictures together. Take a look, see if anything rings a bell."

Zane took the large book awkwardly. It was heavy. There were a LOT of pictures inside.

Zane opened the book. He looked at picture after picture of Rikki and him. There were pictures of them on the beach, pictures of them kissing, pictures of them with Lewis, Cleo, and a blonde boy and girl he didn't recognize.

Zane looked at the pictures closely. He didn't know the Zane in these photos. He looked soooooo... happy. Zane flipped through the book to the last picture. It was of Rikki and him. They were facing each other holding hands. Rikki was smiling and looking down and Zane was looking right at her face, a huge smile plastered across his face. He was wearing a black suit and Rikki was in a deep blue gown. The same shade of blue his room was painted, Zane noticed.

Rikki saw him looking at the picture. "That's us at the summer dance last year." She said quietly. "That same dance is next week, we had planned to go together."

Zane snickered. "I don't dance." He told Rikki.

Wordlessly Rikki reached into the box and pulled out two tickets for next week's dance. She handed them to him, along with the receipt. At the bottom of the receipt was Zane's signature.

Zane looked at them, trying to figure out what to say. "Well, it doesn't look like we're going, does it? You should just give them to someone else."

Rikki tried not to listen to him. She reached into the box and pulled out a messy stack of paper. She handed the stack to Zane.

"What's this?" Zane didn't know what he was looking at.

"Notes." Rikki told him. "Some from you, some from me."

Zane opened the first note. He was surprised to see his familiar handwriting.

'Rikki,' the note said. 'Meet me at 11 tonight, I have a surprise for you.'

The note was signed simply 'Z.'

Zane picked up another note.

'Please talk to me, let me explain about what happened today. I love you.' The next note read.

Zane held it up questioningly.

"That was after you kissed Sophie." Rikki explained. "When we had broken up."

Sophie... the girl from yesterday. So that was who he'd kissed. Zane didn't know what to think about all this. He picked up another note and unfolded it.

'Tonight is a full moon, please be careful. I'll meet you at Mako.' This one read.

Zane read it a couple times, not understanding it. He read it aloud

to Rikki.

"Oh, um... that," Rikki hadn't realized that note was in the box. She hadn't meant for him to read it. "We used to always, uh, hang out on the full moon. It was kind of our thing." She felt like she had successfully answered the question honestly.

"Be careful?" Zane questioned. "We went to Mako? Isn't that that weird island? What were we doing out there?"

Rikki kicked herself for letting that note into Zane's hands. She didn't know how to answer him. She swiftly plucked the note from him and folded it, putting it in her pocket.

"Oh it's nothing." She said.

Zane sat there, confused. The note had been written by him, he must have known what he'd been writing about.

Trying to change the subject, Rikki reached into the box and pulled out a hardback book. She opened the cover and handed it to Zane.

Yet again Zane found himself looking at his own handwriting. "For my Rikki." He read aloud.

Rikki nodded.

Zane tossed the book down on the bed. "Listen, Rikki, he began. "It's not that I don't believe you. I mean, this stuff is all great. But I'm just not remembering anything."

"Nothing?" Rikki had been hoping so hard.

"Nothing." Zane looked her in the eyes. He did feel bad. She was here trying so hard, but he just wasn't feeling it. Whatever it was that made him attracted to her in the past hadn't made itself know yet.

Rikki was desperate. "Come on a date with me. Let me take you out to our favorite place. If you still don't feel anything I'll... I'll leave you alone. I promise. Just give me one more chance. "

Zane looked at her. She seemed so anxious. what harm could it do to go on a date with a pretty girl? "Alright." He answered her.

Rikki let out a relieved sigh. "Great. Tomorrow night?"

Zane nodded. As he looked at her he had a sudden urge to kiss her. But it vanished as soon as it had come.

Rikki headed home after that, leaving the box with Zane. She was hoping he would look through it some more after she'd gone. She was excited to plan their night together.

Rikki quickly phoned Cleo and Bella to update them on Zane. As always, they offered to help her in any way they could.

"Actually, I have an idea." Rikki spoke into the phone.

"Yes?" Cleo answered.

"Tomorrow night he's agreed to go on a date with me." Rikki explained. "Why don't you guys join us for the first part of it?"

"You want to share your date with Zane with us?" Bella said inquisitively.

"The majority of the time Zane and I spend together is with you two and Lewis and Will." Rikki pointed out. "I'm not saying we spend the whole night together, but maybe for a bit?"

"That's a good idea, Rikki." Cleo said reassuringly. "We'll be there. Just let up know the time and place."

"Great, thanks guys." Rikki shut her phone. Time to get to planning. She would plan the most perfect evening ever.

Zane would have to remember.

5. Date night

Rikki spent all of that evening and the entirety of the next morning working out exactly what she and Zane would do together. She wanted to do as many familiar things with him as possible, anything that might help his memory. Rikki smiled as she thought about their evening. Her smile faded slightly as she thought of their favorite thing they did together. She wouldn't be able to take Zane to the moon pool tonight. But that was ok. Rikki's smile returned. Tonight would be perfect.

Zane sat up at the sound of the doorbell. To his surprise, he found that he was excited to see Rikki. He had waited all day for this date and he was actually a little nervous. Zane made his way to the door, moving a little easier today than he had been able to yesterday. His ribs were healing, although slowly. Zane opened the front door eagerly.

Zane's heart dropped as he saw that it wasn't Rikki at the door, it was Lewis.

"Lewis? What do you want?" Zane said bitterly as he stood in the doorway, without inviting Lewis inside.

"Hey, Zane. They told me you were back to being a spoiled rich boy." Lewis said calmly.

Lewis and Zane had become close friends over the last couple years, mostly because of the secret they kept for the girls. Rikki had warned Lewis that Zane's personality had changed after the accident. Zane was acting just as spiteful as he had years ago. But Lewis was ready for it, and utterly unconcerned.

"What did you just say?" Zane raised his eyebrows, bristling. Who did Lewis think he was, talking to him like that?

Lewis smirked, but not in a mean way. "Let me in, bud."

Without waiting for Zane to say yes or no, Lewis ducked under Zane's

arm and walked into the house.

"Hey," Zane shut the door and followed Lewis up the steps. "Where do you think you're going?"

"To your room." Lewis called behind him as he walked.

Zane couldn't walk up the stairs as quickly as Lewis. By the time he'd made it up to his bedroom Lewis already had Zane's closet doors open and was rifling through his clothes, occasionally checking a white piece of lined paper he'd pulled from his pocket.

Zane slammed the door. "Hey! Get your hands out of my things. Now."

Lewis paused, looking up at Zane. He waved the sheet of paper in the air. "Rikki's instructions." Lewis explained. "For tonight."

Lewis pulled out a dark charcoal gray jacket and tossed it to Zane. A few seconds later he located a V-neck maroon shirt. He took the jacket from Zane and laid it on the bed, placing the maroon shirt on top. He then walked over to Zane's dresser, opened the bottom drawer, and removed a pair of dark blue jeans. He unfolded these and laid them below the jacket and shirt.

"Your outfit for tonight." Lewis said proudly, stepping back.

Zane laughed bitterly. "What, aren't you going to pick out my boxers too?"

Lewis pointed at the jacket. "Rikki gave you that last year for your birthday. You love it." Lewis pointed to the shirt. "That shirt is Rikki's favorite. You wear it all the time because you know she likes it." And, Lewis gestured to the jeans. "And the jeans, well... I don't really know about the jeans. I guess Rikki just likes the color." Lewis crossed his arms over his chest.

Zane opened his mouth to say something sarcastic but couldn't really think of what to say.

"I'll just leave you to it then." Lewis said, heading towards the door. "Take your time getting ready. Meet me downstairs when you're done."

Lewis patted Zane on the shoulder and walked out of the bedroom, pulling the door shut behind him.

Zane looked at the clothes on the bed. He reached out and felt the cuff of the jacket. It was well-worn, he had clearly worn it often. Zane pulled on the clothes and looked at himself in the full length mirror. As he looked at himself he had a sudden flash of memory that was so strong he had to sit on the edge of the bed. He closed his eyes as he tried to keep the memory from escaping him.

In the memory he was wearing the same gray jacket. He, Rikki, Lewis, and Cleo were laying on the beach together on a blanket. Zane was laying on his back with Rikki nestled beside him. Cleo and Lewis were on the other end of the blanket, laughing as they looked at stars. Zane looked over at Rikki, locked eyes with her, and smiled as he leaned in for a kiss.

Zane opened his eyes, slightly out of breath. He remembered. At least he remembered that one particular moment. And he was able to hang on to it without letting it escape him. Zane let a small smile cross his face. He couldn't wait to see Rikki that night.

Zane came down the steps 15 minutes later. Lewis was comfortably reclining in the armchair watching tv. Lewis looked up as Zane entered the room.

"Now don't you look sharp." Lewis said conversationally as he stood. Lewis reached in his pocket. "Here, before I forget."

Lewis pulled out a small bottle of cologne. "You always wear this when you go out with Rikki. She's crazy about it." Lewis tossed Zane the bottle.

Zane caught it with one hand. Zane narrowed his eyes at Lewis. "You seem to know an awful lot about what Rikki and I do." He said suspiciously.

Lewis put his hands in his pockets and looked at Zane. "That's because we're friends." He said carefully.

Zane laughed. "You and me?"

Lewis nodded. "Yup. Let's just say we have a lot more in common than you realize."

The pair stood in silence, awkwardly. Lewis ended up breaking the silence.

"Ready?"

Zane nodded.

"Then let's go." Lewis started toward the front door.

"I'm going with you?" Zane didn't follow him.

"Yup. We have to go get the girls." Lewis opened the door and waited for Zane to join him.

Zane didn't have much choice other than to follow him. They started walking towards Rikki's. Zane found himself surprised at how easy conversation was with Lewis. Maybe they really were friends?

Lewis waited down the driveway while Zane walked up the front steps and rang the doorbell at Rikki's.

Zane found himself unable to breathe as the door opened. Rikki stood there in a beautiful sky blue dress that complimented her skin tone perfectly. Her hair fell to her shoulders in gentle curls. She smiled at Zane brilliantly as she stepped out the door.

"Hey." She said gently.

Zane couldn't say anything just yet. He couldn't believe how beautiful she looked. He had another feeling of déjà vu as she shut the door behind her.

"You look great." He managed to say.

"Right back at you." She said. "I hope you didn't mind me sending Lewis over."

"It's fine." Zane still couldn't look away from her. He offered her his hand.

Rikki looked at his extended arm in excitement. She smiled even bigger as she took his hand in hers. The pair walked shyly down the front walk to where Lewis waited.

Cleo came walking up at that moment.

"Perfect timing." Lewis told her as he gave her a peck on the cheek.

The group started walking towards a small restaurant on the beach. The two couples frequented it often, it was small and secluded and offered amazing pasta.

Rikki peeked a look at Zane out of the corner of her eye. He looked amazing. She sighed happily.

The four met Bella and Will at the eatery. They introduced themselves to Zane, which felt really weird to them. They knew Zane very well, and he knew them. Just not so much anymore.

Zane had expected the meal to be awkward, since he was spending time with people he didn't really know. To his surprise, within ten minutes they were all laughing easily and telling stories.

All said and done, the evening was a blast. The group told Zane story after story about the time they'd spent together. They told him about the time Lewis had taken a dare to try the hottest hot sauce in the world and had spent the rest of the day throwing up. They told him about the time that Zane and Lewis had decided to see if your tongue really did stick to a frozen pole. It did. The group laughed at each story. The rest of the group was having a lot of fun just reliving all of the experiences. Zane found himself listening avidly, eager to hear more.

The original plan was to have a quick dinner and then have Cleo, Lewis, Will, and Rikki head out, but they were having such a good time together they ended up just staying at the restaurant. Zane looked beside him at Rikki as they all laughed about a time Cleo had fallen into a birthday cake she'd been carrying. Zane reached for Rikki's hand under the table and squeezed it. He rubbed his thumb over hers as he smiled at her. He'd only had a few flashes of memory, but he couldn't deny that this felt right. Rikki smiled back at him.

The one moment of the meal that made everyone nervous was when their waiter accidentally knocked over a glass of water onto the table. Like a flash, the girls were on the other end of the room. Lewis quickly cleaned it up, making sure to get every drop off the table. The girls apologized for dashing off, saying that they didn't want to get their dresses yet. Lewis and Will watched Zane carefully as they settled back down at the table. It only took a few minutes for the

group to forget about the incident.

Eventually the food was gone, and the lights began to be shut off in the eatery. The group decided it was time to head out. Everyone hugged each other before going their own separate ways, pair by pair. Rikki had offered to walk Zane back to his house. Typically after a date he would walk her to her place, but he was walking so gingerly Rikki wanted to make sure he made it back alright.

The pair stood silently on Zane's step. Neither knew quite what to say.

"So..." Zane began awkwardly. "Would you like to come in for just a bit?"

"Sure." Rikki said, looking up at him.

They walked inside and up to Zane's room. Zane's dad was in the living room watching some sports game.

The tow stood in Zane's room, looking around, not sure what to do next.

Zane made up his mind. He stepped to Rikki and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Thank you, for tonight." He said softly.

"Remember anything?" Rikki answered back, hopefully.

"I remember a bit." Zane said. "I remember you, a little. I remember that I like to be with you."

Glee spread across Rikki's face. "Really?" She said ecstatically.

Zane didn't want to get her hopes up too much. "I don't remember much," He tried to clarify. "But this feels right."

He ran his hands down Rikki's arms, taking both of her hands in his. He stepped closer to her and leaned in, giving her a sweet kiss on the lips.

Rikki smiled as the kiss ended. "Thank you." She whispered.

Zane smiled at her. He'd never felt like this before. "Can I see you tomorrow?"

Rikki had to keep herself from screaming with happiness. "I'd love that."

The said their goodnights and Rikki headed home, leaving Zane in his room.

Zane let himself fall into his bed. He really, really liked this girl. This was right, it all felt right. Maybe they could go swimming tomorrow?

Zane reached over and picked up the picture of Rikki that sat beside the bed. He smiled as he looked at the pair of them in the photo.

Zane looked at it for a long time before deciding that he should probably be headed to sleep. He tried to set the picture back on the table, but as he twisted to stand his ribs gave a sharp pang and he dropped it.

The picture clattered to the floor. The frame had broken into 3 pieces upon impact and the glass had shattered.

"Oh, no..." Zane gingerly dropped to his knees as he picked up the pieces. He spread them out on the floor. He carefully reached into the shards of glass and pulled out the picture. He made sure that it hadn't been scratched and set it out of the way on the bed.

Zane looked back down at the pile of picture frame. To his surprise, there was another picture in the shards of glass. No, TWO more pictures. Zane furrowed his brow. The pictures must have been stuck in behind the other picture of Rikki and him. Zane picked the first one up and turned it over in his hands. He froze, shocked, as he looked at the image in the photo.

The photo was of Rikki, Cleo, and Bella. They were in the water, smiling at the camera. But that wasn't what was keeping Zane from blinking. All three had long tails instead of legs. Tails that looked like... like mermaid tails? Zane shook his head, this picture must have been from halloween or something.

Zane picked up the second picture, turning it over quickly to look at it.

The image in this picture was Rikki and, he looked closer, himself. He stood in a pool of water that looked to be about waist deep. He had Rikki cradled in his arms, one arm behind her back and the other hooked beneath her knees, holding her out of the water. Wait... those weren't her knees. Again, Rikki had a long, golden mermaid's tail. They were looking at each other with huge smiles on their faces.

Zane dropped the photos. This wasn't possible. Rikki was a girl, a regular girl. She wasn't some kind of freak, right? Zane stood, shaken.

Zane knew exactly what he was going to ask her about tomorrow.

6. Explanation

Rikki jumped awake early the next morning. She shook her head, trying to wake herself up.

Again she heard the loud knock coming from downstairs. She tried to rub the sleep from her eyes as she climbed out of the bed.

Rikki stumbled down the stairs and pulled open the front door.

"We need to talk." Zane spoke without preamble as he walked past her into the house.

Rikki closed the front door. "Hmmm?" She murmured sleepily. She was happy to see Zane but she was supremely exhausted. It was barely seven in the morning.

"What is this?" Zane held out the picture of Rikki and him. The picture where she was a mermaid and Zane was holding her.

Zane had been examining the picture for the better part of the night. He had tried to spot clues that said it was a costume, but there wasn't a velcro or zipper in sight. The scales on the fin seemed to meld directly into Rikki's skin. He wanted Rikki to tell him that it was all crazy talk. Mermaids didn't exist.

Rikki didn't know what to say. She looked at Zane's face. He was looking at her without a hint of smile. His eyes were steady.

"Well?" He took another look at the picture before extending it back to Rikki again. "What is it? What is this picture? Or" Zane pulled the other picture from his pocket, "this one?"

Rikki took the pictures from him. They'd taken them months ago. She'd given them to Zane as part of a birthday gift.

Rikki wracked her brain, panicked. She didn't want to lie to him. He'd had a hard enough time regaining his memory, she didn't want to set him back by lying about such a big part of his memories. On the other hand, Zane didn't have the same feelings towards her as he used to. He had a few feelings for her, but who knew how much that would matter to him? What if finding out she was a mermaid freaked him out? What if he told someone about her secret?

Rikki was still speechless as she looked at Zane with her mouth hanging open. Zane was standing watching her impatiently.

"Your silence says a lot." Zane paced back and forth across the living room. "Rikki, I've looked at these pictures for hours. They don't look like costumes." Zane paused. "The way all three of you dodged that water spill last night at the restaurant... I didn't think anything of it then, but..." Zane walked to stand directly in front of Rikki.

"What is going on? What are you?" Zane said quietly. He was watching Rikki closely, hoping that she would laugh and tell him that he was crazy.

"Zane," Rikki managed, "Can we talk about this another time?"

Zane's eyes widened. "So it's true. It must be or you would have said different." Zane began pacing again, lost in his thoughts. What was she? Or Cleo and that new Bella girl? Was it contagious? What about Lewis? Did he know?"

Rikki stepped in front of Zane, stopping him. "Please." She started. "Let's go for a walk, let's talk about things." Rikki reached out for Zane's hand.

"No!" Zane dodged her hand as if it were on fire. "I don't want to go anywhere. Tell me." Zane pointed at the pictures she held. He needed to hear her say it out loud. "Is this true?"

Rikki didn't feel like she had a choice. She couldn't bring herself to lie to Zane. She owed him honesty.

She nodded, saying nothing.

"So, you and Bella and Cleo are..." Zane trailed off. He couldn't bring himself to say the word aloud.

Rikki finished for him. "Mermaids." She said the word just loud enough for Zane to hear.

Zane sank into the couch, wincing as his ribs pinched. He was breathing hard, trying to wrap his mind around things

Rikki knelt at the arm of the couch, beside him. "Please, just listen to me."

"I need to go." Zane stood abruptly, again ignoring the pain in his ribs. He needed to get out of there.

"No, Zane, stop-" Rikki followed him to the door, desperately trying to convince him to stay. At least long enough to know whether he would tell anyone or not.

"No," Zane turned around, looking at Rikki angrily. "I don't want to see you or any of your freak friends. Just leave me alone."

Zane's words hurt Rikki deeply. She wished she'd remembered about the pictures. There were so many more ways she would have preferred him found out than this.

Rikki had to try one more time. She spoke quickly. "Zane, you're ok with this, really. You've known for years. You go swimming with us all the time, it isn't a big deal-"

"Isn't a big deal?" Zane raised his eyebrows. "You're a fish, Rikki. This is a big deal. And don't tell me what I'm ok with. Just... stop."

With that Zane turned on his heel and left Rikki's house, slamming the door behind him.

Rikki sat on the couch, speechless. Her eyes watered with tears. She'd been through many ups and downs with Zane, but she'd never seen him like that. He had been so disgusted with her. Rikki let her head fall into her hands. She didn't know what to do. She lifted her head. She had to try to convince Zane not to tell anyone. Rikki reached for her mobile, quickly dialing Cleo's number.

Zane didn't remember walking home. His head was so full he couldn't seem to focus on any one thing. Before he knew it he was standing on his front porch. Zane let himself in and walked up to his room. He let himself fall onto his bed and stared up at the ceiling.

Rikki was a mermaid. No, she couldn't really be. Maybe she was just messing with him. But that didn't seem very likely. Zane rolled over onto his stomach. He picked up the picture that had been displayed in the frame. The one where Rikki looked absolutely normal. She looked so beautiful. Zane felt his anger fade as he looked at the picture. But then he reminded himself that Rikki was some kind of freakish fish. He felt betrayed. Zane put the picture down and dropped his head onto the bed.

Zane's phone went off. He reluctantly picked it up.

"Hello?" He said.

"Zane!" A perky voice answered him. It was Sophie.

Zane sighed, he didn't feel like dealing with anyone right then.

"What is it?" He replied.

"I was just wondering when would be a good time for us to meet up to discuss our business venture." Sophie didn't miss a beat.

"Listen, Sophie," Zane started. "I really don't need to be doing business right now. I have practically no memory. And I'm exhausted. Maybe in a few weeks."

"Well, actually, this opportunity is only viable for the next week, we'll need to get right on it." Sophie was relentless. "Plus, we had spoken about it before your accident. And you know, us spending time together will probably help you remember. You know, about... us."

Zane furrowed his brow. What if Rikki had lied to him? He knew that he and Rikki had broken up because he had kissed Sophie. And then Rikki had said that they had gotten back together, but what if they hadn't? What if he did really have feelings for Sophie? As hard as he tried, Zane couldn't imagine being alright with dating a girl who turned into an ocean creature. He had taken it for granted that Rikki was telling him the truth. How much more wasn't she telling him?

"Zane?" Sophie's voice brought him back into the present.

"Ugh, yeah sure." Zane decided it wouldn't hurt anything to meet up with her. "How is tomorrow at noon?"

"It's perfect." Sophie sounded very pleased. "Can't wait."

"Bye." Zane flipped the phone shut. All he wanted to do was forget about that afternoon. Zane closed his eyes and tried to sleep. Eventually he drifted off.

Zane's dreams were filled with mermaids, the ocean, and Rikki. He tossed and turned and woke up feeling less rested than he had when he'd fallen asleep if that was possible.

Zane sat up in the bed. It was about 7 in the evening. Zane stood up slowly, rubbing his temples. He slowly slumped his way down the stairs. He felt bad about the way he'd treated Rikki. But he was also completely weirded out with the whole thing.

Zane reached the landing and was surprised to see a blonde head sitting on the couch in his living room.

"Lewis?" Zane was caught off guard.

Lewis turned to look at Zane from his place on the couch. "Oh hey,

you're up." He greeted him.

"What are you doing here?" Zane was very confused. "How did you get in?"

"Ah," Lewis stood. "Your dad let me in. Have a seat?" Lewis gestured to the couch.

Zane sat down hesitantly. "Why are you here?"

Lewis sat, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. "Listen buddy, we need to talk."

"This is about Rikki?" Zane suddenly understood why Lewis was there.

"This is about all of us." Lewis spoke comfortingly. "We're your friends. Your closest friends."

Zane looked at Lewis out of the corner of his eye. "When you say 'we,' you mean..."

"You, me, Will, Cleo, Bella, and Rikki." Lewis confirmed.

"But, the girls, they're..." Zane didn't finish the sentence.

Lewis did. "They're mermaids," He said matter of factly.

Zane hadn't expected Lewis to be so blunt. He didn't know how to respond. He simply nodded.

Lewis continued calmly "And you're totally freaked out."

Zane just nodded again.

Lewis leaned a little closer to where Zane sat. "I don't blame you." He said. "It's an awful lot to take in, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Zane admitted. "It's crazy."

Zane didn't know why, but he felt comfortable talking to Lewis.

"So, ummm.." Zane felt silly sitting there talking about mermaids. "How long have you known?"

"Since the beginning." Lewis answered. "I found out just a few days after they first changed."

Zane raised his eyebrows. "So they haven't always been..."

"Mermaids?" Lewis shook his head. "Nope. They used to be perfectly ordinary girls. Well," Lewis laughed, "As ordinary as those girls get."

Lewis explained to Zane about how Cleo and Rikki had changed. He told him all about the moon pool as well. Zane felt himself drawn into the story.

"You know, if it weren't for the girls you probably wouldn't be here

today." Lewis said casually.

"What?" Zane was confused.

Lewis recounted the day, a few years ago, when Zane had been aboard a sinking boat. He had been trapped in the cabin and couldn't get out. Emma, Rikki and Cleo's close friend who was also a mermaid, had saved his life.

Zane sank back into the couch. This was an awful lot to process.

Lewis kept talking. He told Zane everything he could remember. He told him all about how Zane became obsessed with hunting mermaids. Lewis told him about all of the research Zane had done, how important the project had been to him.

Zane had to keep reminding him that everything Lewis was telling him had actually happened. It sounded like the plot of a movie.

Zane sat up. "And how did I find out?"

Lewis took a deep breath and told Zane all about Dr. Denman, and how she'd found out about the girls.

"When you and your dad walked into the moon pool, there were the girls in the water." Lewis finished.

Zane had a million questions. How had he reacted? What did Rikki say? His own father knew? He selected the question that seemed the simplest to answer. "Then what?"

Lewis finished the story. Zane had rescued Lewis and then the pair had saved the girls from Denman's trap. He told Zane about how the girls had gone into the moon pool that night and had given up their powers just long enough to convince everyone that they were normal once again.

Zane and Lewis sat in silence after Lewis finished his story. Lewis was waiting to see how Zane would handle the deluge of information. He watched him closely.

Zane was sitting on the couch staring into space. He felt like his world had been flipped over. He was finding out that he'd been very much involved in something magic, but his brain was still telling him that magic wasn't real.

The boys had been talking for nearly two hours. Lewis looked up as the clock chimed.

"So..." Lewis watched Zane, "How are you handling things?"

Zane stood, walking slowly to the other side of the room. "I'm working on it."

"Good. Zane, it's really important that this stays a secret." Lewis followed Zane. "Can you do that?"

Zane thought to himself. He really wished he had someone else to talk to about this. An independent person. He still didn't want to see

Rikki, and as much as he appreciated Lewis explaining things, it would be a huge relief to talk to someone neutral. Lewis had told him that Zane protected Rikki's secret because he loved her so much. Sure, he may have loved her at one time, but he didn't love her right now. He liked her, or thought he did, but he didn't love her.

"I'll try." Zane said, not meeting Lewis's eye.

Lewis didn't know if Zane meant it or not. He would keep a close eye on him over the next few days.

"Hey man, this is a lot to take in," Lewis put a hand on Zane's shoulder. "How about I crash with you tonight?"

Zane didn't much care either way. "Sure, whatever. You can sleep in the guest room." Zane started up the stairs. He needed to think things over. "Just be awake before noon tomorrow"

"How come?" Lewis didn't plan on sleeping past 8am, but he wondered what plans Zane might have.

"I have a meeting." Zane muttered as he reached the top of the steps.

"Oh," Lewis was really curious now. "With who?"

"Some girl named Sophie." Zane said without turning around. He shut the bedroom door behind him.

7. Attempts

Lewis was pacing back and forth in the kitchen when Zane came down the steps the next morning.

Zane gave him an odd look. "You're still here?"

"Yeah," Lewis said, preoccupied. "Let's head out to see the girls today."

"The girls?" Zane questioned. "You mean the mermaids?"

"They're normal girls, Zane." Lewis said seriously. "The mermaid thing really isn't that big of a deal."

Zane snorted. "Really, Lewis? Dating girls who turn into fish isn't a big deal?"

Lewis paused, thinking. A lot of pressure had been put on his shoulders. He and Zane were friends, he felt like he could make Zane think a little more clearly.

Lewis walked purposefully to stand in front of Zane. "Listen to me," He said solemnly. "The girls are great. And you do love Rikki."

Zane snickered. "I love a fish?" Zane sat on the couch and leaned over with his elbows on his knees. "Lewis, this is all just just way too weird."

"I know it is," Lewis sat opposite from Zane. " It's weird. It's

really weird. But Zane, it's ok. We're alright with it. We've known for years now."

Zane looked at Lewis skeptically. "Listen. I can't imagine just being fine with dating a girl that turns into an ocean creature."

Lewis sighed. The reason Zane was so ok with things was because he was so deeply in love with Rikki. How was Lewis supposed to make him fall back in love with Rikki right now?

"Let's hang with the girls today." Lewis suggested enthusiastically. "Spend some time with them, you'll see. It's actually really cool."

Zane was surprised to realize that he did kind of want to see Rikki. Just a little bit. He was still massively freaked out, but for whatever reason, he wanted to speak with her.

Zane looked at his watch. "I'm late for a meeting," He said as he briskly picked up his bag and started to the door.

"The meeting with Sophie?" Lewis followed at Zane's heels, almost walking right into Zane when he stopped suddenly.

"Yes, if it is your business." Zane answered.

"Let me come with you." Lewis dodged to stand between Zane and the door. "Sophie can be a little... manipulative."

"I think I can manage," Zane said absently as he stepped around Lewis to open the door.

"So I'll just come along with you, then?" Lewis was determined not to let Zane meet Sophie alone.

"I don't need a babysitter, Lewis." Zane walked out the door without looking back.

Lewis pulled the door shut behind him and stood on the porch, watching Zane walk off. He didn't know what else to do.

Zane shook his head as he walked, trying to clear it. He kept having flashes of images, but none of them made any sense. It felt like he was waking up from a dream. The details faded almost as soon as they came, Zane couldn't seem to hold onto any of it. Something about Lewis's tone seemed so familiar. Zane believed that they must have been close friends. At one point, anyway.

Thinking about Rikki brought up a wide range of emotions. He felt like he wanted to see her but at the same time he didn't want to be near her.

Zane thought about Sophie. He pictured her face, remembered the tone of her voice. Zane pictured her as clearly as he possibly could, waiting to see how he felt about her. Zane stopped walking as he thought. He didn't feel anything. Nothing. The thought of the red head of hair didn't do anything for him. Not even a flash of memory.

Zane continued walking, cautiously, as he thought. At first, he

hadn't felt anything when he looked at Rikki, right? He was having feelings for her now, but they'd spent quite a lot of time together. Maybe spending time with Sophie would have the same effect?

Zane reached the dock they'd agreed to meet at just a few minutes before noon.

"Well look at you!" The high pitched voice came from a few feet away. Zane turned to look at Sophie.

"You look fantastic." Sophie beamed as she reached Zane. "Feeling better?" She watched him closely for an answer.

"Ah, better." Zane said awkwardly.

"And your memory?" Sophie watched even closer.

"It's getting there, slowly." Zane had picked up on her attention to him. He stepped one step back from her and examined her.

Sophie's eyes opened innocently. "What is it?"

Zane shook his head. "Nothing. You wanted to talk business?"

"In a bit, sure." Sophie gave Zane a sugary sweet smile. "I thought we could grab something to eat first? Have a little chit chat?"

"Ok, I guess." Zane didn't really want to, but he figured he should give his brain a chance to try and remember Sophie.

"Great, I know the perfect place." Sophie grabbed his hand and lead him a few streets away to a swanky Italian restaurant.

Zane and Sophie were seated quickly at a small booth. Zane looked around the place. It was cold, the seats were uncomfortable. Sophie flipped open a menu and began jabbering about what she was thinking about ordering. Zane found his mind wandering to Rikki. He thought about her smile, her laugh. The way she had looked on their date the other night.

"What do you think?" Sophie's voice brought Zane back to the table. She was looking at him expectantly, waiting for him to answer her.

"Ah, er, sorry. What was that?" Zane tried to focus on the conversation.

"Zane..." Sophie fussed playfully. "I was just saying that we should go for a walk down the beach after dinner. It's gorgeous out, don't you think?"

"Oh, I dunno." Zane stalled. "I'll probably just head home. Exhausted, you know? Plus, isn't the purpose of this meeting so that we can discuss business?"

"Well, yes," Sophie reached across the table and took Zane's hand in hers. " But I thought we could spend a little time together first."

Zane looked at Sophie's hand in his, waiting to feel something.

Anything. But nothing came to him. Nothing good, nothing bad, just indifference.

Their food arrived then. It was served on fancy silver platters. Zane looked at the table. There were several forks and spoons around the plates. Zane didn't know what to eat with. This restaurant really didn't suit him, it wasn't his kind of place.

"So, why did you choose this place?" Zane tried to speak conversationally.

"Oh, I knew you'd love it." Sophie basked in self-gratification. "This is exactly the kind of place we used to go to. You know," Sophie shrugged her shoulders, "before the accident."

"Really?" Zane's head was hurting him. This didn't seem like the kind of place he'd ever walk into. His dad had been dragging him to fancy places for years, and as a result, Zane much preferred more casual surroundings.

"Of course." Sophie smiled at him. "I wouldn't expect you to remember."

"No, I don't." Zane was thinking hard, trying to force himself to remember this place, and Sophie. All he succeeded in doing was to make his head pound.

The meal seemed to crawl by. Zane tried to keep up a conversation with Sophie, but he had a hard time thinking of what to say to her. Sophie filled the time jabbering about how the two of them had met. She told him that they were the best of friends, and that they'd gone on several dates. She admitted that they were not officially boyfriend and girlfriend, but she insisted that they would have been soon.

Zane looked up at Sophie. "What about Rikki?"

"Oh, her." Sophie rolled her eyes. "Yeah, you two dated for a bit, but it wasn't serious. Personally, I think she was a little immature for you. You guys never really got each other, you know?"

Zane nodded, but he didn't really understand what she was saying. Who was telling him the truth? His instincts told him that Rikki had been honest about their relationship, but clearly Rikki hadn't been honest about everything. So far, Sophie hadn't done anything that would make him distrust her, right?

Zane's head was pulsing. "I need to go home." He said quietly as he rubbed his temples.

"Now?" Sophie's face fell. "But we're having such a nice time?"

"Yeah, sorry. I'm not feeling well." Zane laid some cash on the table for their meal and stood.

"I'll walk you." Sophie said perkily as she slid her chair back and stood up.

"No, that's ok," Zane said a little quickly. "I'll call you."

"Oh." Sophie's face darkened for a second before she plastered the smile back on.

They walked outside. Sophie faced Zane and wrapped her arms around him tightly. Zane winced as a shooting pain shot through his injured ribs. Sophie didn't seem to notice. She tilted her face up to Zane's. Before he could really realize what she was doing she pressed her lips against his.

Zane stepped back, gently pushing Sophie back. "My ribs..." He offered as an explanation.

"Oh right, I forgot." Sophie apologized.

They said goodnight. Sophie promised to call the next day. Zane nodded and started home.

Zane walked in his front door, said goodnight to his father, and walked up the steps into his bedroom. He stood inside and looked at the room. Just a few days ago it had seemed foreign to him. Now the color on the walls comforted him.

Zane sat at the edge of the bed, cradling his head in his hands. He was seeing spots, his head felt so completely full of information that he couldn't sort anything out.

Zane sighed and stood to walk over to his dresser. He pulled open the top drawer and reached in for his old, comfortable sweatpants. He pulled them out and started to push the drawer shut, but stopped when he saw something pushed into the back corner of the drawer.

Zane reached his hand in and took out a small black box that had been hidden under the clothes. He carried it to the bed and sat, holding it in his hands.

Zane slowly opened the lid of the box. Inside was a smaller, velvet box. Zane's heart beat quickly as he looked at it. It couldn't be a... could it?

Zane held the velvet box in one hand and slowly reached to flip open the lid.

Inside was a delicate diamond ring with a silver band. Zane took the ring in the palm of his hand and held it up to examine it closely. He'd never seen it before. The stone in the middle was a diamond that had the very slightest tint of blue to it. It was simple.

Zane dropped the ring back into the box and stood, pacing the room. This wasn't possible. Was the ring for Rikki? Or Sophie? Or maybe it wasn't for anyone, maybe he was just saving it til he met someone. But the blue tinted diamond...

Zane hesitantly picked up the ring again and held it right up to his eye, looking into the inside of the band. There, in the faintest of engravings, were the words 'Love is an ocean, Z.'

Zane spent the majority of that night laying flat on his back with his eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. He was exhausted but he couldn't sleep. He had so many questions going through his head. Who was telling him the truth? Rikki or Sophie? Could he trust Lewis? Who could he trust anywhere? What was he supposed to do about any of this?

Zane turned his head to look at the ring, which he had dropped on the nightstand. He stared at it for a long time, willing himself to remember it. Nothing. Not a flash of memory, not a thing. The ring was a complete mystery to him. Zane tried to calm his brain enough to drift off to sleep, but it was useless. Zane kept thinking about Rikki, of Sophie, of mermaids, of Lewis, of everything. More than ever Zane tried his hardest to force himself to remember the last few years, but he couldn't do it. his mind simply wouldn't listen to him.

The sun rose as Zane laid in the bed. He became restless and climbed out of the bed, stretching his arms up as high as he could. Zane checked the clock beside his bed. It was 6 in the morning. Way too early to be awake, but he couldn't just lay there any longer.

Zane stumbled down the steps. He was surprised to see his father in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee.

"I thought you'd be gone by now?" Zane said sleepily.

Harrison looked up. "Finishing one more before I go." He said, gesturing to the mug in his hands.

Zane walked to stand across the counter from Harrison. He looked at his father closely before speaking.

"Dad," Zane began. "I need to ask you something."

Harrison looked up from the newspaper he'd been reading. "Yes?" He asked.

Zane swallowed and took a deep breath before he asked "How serious am I about Rikki?"

Harrison was surprised at Zane's question. Yes, the two of them had become closer over the years, but they'd never been big on discussing personal relationships.

"Well..." He began. "You two spend an awful lot of time together, I guess."

"You guess?" Zane had been hoping for a more specific answer from his father.

A small smile crossed Harrison's face. "You two were inseparable." He admitted. "You spent practically every free second together."

Zane nodded slightly, lost in thought. His eyes narrowed. "What about Sophie?"

"Who?" Harrison had a confused look on his face.

"Never mind." Zane pulled out his phone and flipped it open. Without

thinking he dialed a number. Before he pushed 'send' he looked at what he had dialed. There, on the display on the phone, was the name 'Lewis.' Zane had dialed Lewis without even thinking about it.

A memory crept into Zane's head and before he knew it, he was leaning on the counter. His mind kept flashing pictures at him. Flashes of Lewis and him. In a boat, speeding across the ocean. Swimming, sitting at the cafe talking. He remembered the two of them being friends. Talking about things. Being even closer than Zane and Nate had been. He couldn't remember specifics, but he could definitely feel their friendship.

"Zane?" Harrison looked at him concernedly. "Are you alright?"

Zane mentally shook himself out of his trance. "Yeah." He said softly. "Just having a flash of memory."

"Great, Zane." Harrison's face spread into a smile. "Don't forget, you have an appointment tomorrow with Dr. Hills."

"Right," Zane said, remembering. "I'll be there."

"Fantastic." Harrison gave his son a smile before picking up his briefcase. "See you later?"

"Yeah." Zane nodded, preoccupied, as his father closed the front door behind him. Zane looked down at his phone, which he still had in his hands. He cleared Lewis's number and looked at the screen.

He'd put it on silent last night. He hadn't wanted to speak with anyone. Zane looked at the screen. He had 4 missed calls. Three from Lewis, and one from Sophie. Zane's brow furrowed. he realized that, in spite of himself, he was disappointed that Rikki hadn't called.

Rikki sat at the edge of her bed with her phone in her hand. She had spent the majority of the last night and that morning trying to make herself call Zane, but she'd been able to go through with it. She would pick up the phone, type in Zane's number, and then close it. She didn't know what she wanted to say to him. She just wanted him to remember everything.

Rikki had gotten an update from Lewis. She was now waiting, nervously, to hear how Zane's meeting with Sophie had gone. She dropped the phone on her bed and walked out of the bedroom, leaving it there.

Zane was still looking at his phone when it rang in his hands. He focused his eyes on the display. Lewis. Zane started to press the 'ignore' button, but paused. He wanted to talk to Lewis.

"Hello?" Zane held the phone to his ear.

"Zane!" Lewis sounded more than a bit anxious. "I am so glad to get ahold of you. Were you awake?"

"Barely." Zane said. He wasn't sure what to say to Lewis at the moment.

"Great." Lewis said quickly. "Can I come over? I mean," Lewis

composed himself. "Want to hang out?"

"Uh, sure." Zane said calmly.

"Really?" Lewis said, surprised. "So I'll be there in ten minutes, k?"

"Fine." Zane finished. He clicked his phone closed.

Zane waited for Lewis to arrive. He was curious to hear what Lewis had to say. He felt comforted that he would be able to talk to a friend. Even though he was still getting used to it, Lewis being a friend just felt right.

Lewis stepped up the front walk a few minutes later. Zane opened the front door before he could knock.

"Hey, Zane." Lewis said, startled.

Zane answered without pausing. "Come in."

Zane stepped aside, letting Lewis walk into the house before he pulled the door shut.

"Have you spoken to Rikki?" Zane asked before Lewis could speak.

"A bit, yes." Lewis answered, confused. His face became hopeful. "Why? Do you remember something?"

"Not really," Zane answered. "But I want to talk to her."

"Great!" Lewis grinned. "Want me to call her?"

"I'll do it." Zane pushed buttons, searching for Rikki's number. He listened as it rang. A short while later he closed the phone, disappointed.

"Voicemail." He said.

"Really?" Lewis frowned. "That's weird." Lewis knew that Rikki had been pretty anxious to hear from Zane.

"Why did you come over, anyway?" Zane asked, realizing that he didn't really mind the company.

"Oh, um, I just thought I'd see I could convince you to come hang out with the girls today?" Lewis said. "By the way, how did your meeting with Sophie go?"

"It was weird." Zane answered, pulling up a seat at the table.

"Weird?" Lewis plopped into the seat across the table from Zane, looking at him closely. "What do you mean, weird?"

"She kept saying that we were such good friends, and that we spent all this time together, but nothing we did last night seemed familiar at all." Zane said thoughtfully.

Lewis clasped his hands together. "Did you tell her anything?"

About... you know."

Zane shook his head no. "I wanted someone to talk to about all of it, and I had thought that maybe I could talk to her. But she seems like a complete stranger. I mean, practically everyone is a complete stranger, but something about Sophie just seemed off."

Lewis nodded. "Good call, mate." He said as he stood up. "Sophie's not someone you really want to confide in."

"I get that." Zane said thoughtfully.

Zane stood and walked to the sink. He poured himself a glass of water before he turned back to Lewis and spoke.

"I remembered some things this morning." Zane said casually.

"Really?" Lewis raised his eyebrows. "About the girls?"

Zane shook his head. "About you. We really were friends, weren't we?"

Lewis nodded. "Yeah, were were."

"Sorry," Zane said awkwardly. "For, you know, treating you so bad."

"Thanks." Lewis answered.

The two settled into an awkward silence. Zane was the one who broke it.

"So," he said, picking up the phone again. "I'll just give Rikki another try."

The phone rang through to voicemail once more. Zane set his phone down and pulled on a light jacket.

"Where are you going?" Lewis asked.

"Rikki's." Zane said, tucking his phone into his pocket. "I want to talk to her."

"Good talk or bad talk?" Lewis stood.

"I don't know yet." Zane said, preoccupied. "I'll, uh, call you later? Maybe?"

"Sure." Lewis nodded. "Good luck."

They went their separate ways. Lewis headed down towards Cleo's and Zane started on his way to Rikki's.

Rikki was surprised to hear a knock at her front door. She'd just gotten off the phone with Cleo and hadn't expected anyone that early in the morning. She quickly walked to the door and pulled it open. She found herself speechless when she saw Zane standing on the front step.

"Oh, um- I-" Rikki managed to stammer out.

"Hey." Zane said quietly. Seeing Rikki's face made him feel something, but he wasn't sure what it was. He knew that his heart was beating fast in his chest, but he couldn't quite decide if it was because her was happy or nervous. Or both.

"Hey." Rikki practically whispered. She was still shocked to see Zane there. "Ah, do you want to come in?"

"Let's go for a walk." Zane's face was unreadable.

"Ok." Rikki nervously stepped outside.

Zane stepped back instinctively, away from Rikki, as she walked outside. He told himself that she was still the same girl he'd kissed the other night.

Rikki had noticed the way Zane had dodged her. She put her hands in her pockets as she walked, trying not to let it bother her.

"I didn't expect to see you." She said.

"Yeah, well." Zane shrugged. "I guess I found myself wanting to see you."

Rikki tried to hide a smile. "Really?"

"Yeah." Zane looked straight ahead as he walked. He had just wanted to talk to Rikki, but being with her made it so easy for him to forget all of the mermaid mess. He shook himself. She was a fish. She wasn't human.

"Where are we headed?" Rikki asked.

"No idea." Zane answered. "Any suggestion?"

"Well," Rikki wasn't sure how Zane would react but she had to try. "What if we go to Mako island? We used to spend an awful lot of time there."

Zane thought it over. It made him nervous to think of being stranded on an island with a mermaid. But being alone on an island with Rikki... that thought wasn't too terribly bad.

"Alright." He agreed.

Rikki couldn't believe it. She hadn't expected to even be able to speak with Zane that day, and here he was agreeing to come out with her to Mako. It all seemed too good to be true. She was beyond nervous about how the day would go.

"Fantastic." She said, beaming. "Want to head to your boat?"

Rikki knew she would need to be very careful riding in the boat to Mako. She always swam to the island, but she didn't want to do anything to make Zane any more uncomfortable than he already obviously was. She would just be as careful as possible not to let water touch her during the ride.

The pair walked silently down the dock and stepped into the small red boat. Rikki sat uncomfortably in the center of the boat. If Zane realized how nervous being this close to the water made her he didn't mention it.

The ride to Mako was a tense one. Neither quite knew what to say, so they decided to sit in silence. Luckily for Rikki, the ocean was calm. She took deep breaths, trying to figure out exactly what to say to Zane when they got there.

"I'm glad we're doing this." Zane smiled at her a little.

Rikki felt encouraged. "I am too." She said.

"I'm sorry I've been a little distant." Zane said. "I'm still trying to figure things out."

"I understand." Rikki said. She reached over and gently poked Zane in the ribs. "Healing up alright?"

Zane twisted away from her touch, but not because he was scared of Rikki. He couldn't help but laugh. "That tickles." He said.

"What, this?" Rikki gave Zane another gentle poke.

Zane laughed and looked at Rikki. He began to feel himself relax.

They arrived at the shore not too much later. Zane carefully stepped out of the boat, but Rikki stayed inside.

"You coming? Zane asked as he pulled the anchor out of the bottom of the boat.

"I can't." Rikki looked at Zane with a nervous face. "I can't touch the water."

"Right." In that moment Zane remembered that Rikki was a mermaid. The tension returned to his face immediately. he had forgotten, just for a minute.

Zane pulled the boat up onto the dry sand. He didn't help Rikki out of the boat. Rikki carefully stepped out onto the sand and gestured towards the trees.

"The moon pool is this way." She said quietly.

Zane followed Rikki as they carefully picked their way through the trees and to the cavern that housed the moon pool.

9. Reunion, kind of

Their footsteps echoed as the pair walked onto the stone floor of the moon pool. Zane walked in first. He walked slowly along the edge of the cavern, looking at the walls. He'd never seen anything like it before. The water was a pure crystal blue, in a pool that was almost a perfect circle. He turned a slow circle, taking it all in. He noticed several cracks and holes gouged out of one of the walls.

"What happened here?" He asked, turning to Rikki.

"Maybe we can talk about that a little later?" Rikki said carefully.

Zane nodded thoughtfully. "That means it's something you don't want to tell me about." He said perceptively.

"Not just yet." Rikki said quickly. "Here, sit down. Look around. Remembering anything?"

Zane shook his head no. This place didn't do anything for him. He sat down cross-legged on the sand and looked up at Rikki.

"That's ok." Rikki wandered around the cave, looking up into the sky. "We used to spend loads of time here. You and me. Give it time."

"I've been giving everything time." Zane allowed a little of the frustration he'd been feeling over the last several days come to the surface. "I've only had a few flashes of memory. I'm tired of giving things time."

Rikki sat beside Zane, careful to give him plenty of space. "Want to talk about it?"

Zane scoffed and spoke with a sarcastic smirk. "Oh please. This isn't a counseling session. Don't try to play therapist."

Rikki was taken aback. She hadn't heard that cold of a tone in Zane's voice in years. He sounded just like he used to, when he and Miriam took pleasure in making the lives of others miserable. She had thought that his attitude in the hospital had just been a result of the initial accident.

Rikki stood, turning her back on Zane and composing herself. She had had every intention of being patient with him, but this whole thing had been hard on her too and she didn't care to be spoken to the way Zane was addressing her. She'd been so careful around him, he could at least treat her with a little respect. She took a couple steps away from him and then turned back on him quickly, making Zane jump a bit.

"Ok." She said, trying not to raise her voice but speaking hotly. "You want to know what happened here?" She gestured to the blown rock wall.

Zane was surprised at Rikki's change in personality. He nodded blankly.

"You and Sophie and a guy named Ryan blew it up." Rikki said as she looked at the cavern. "It used to be a beautiful place here. You guys were mining for gems and you blew it to pieces. We've been cleaning up behind you three for weeks now, trying to make the place look better. It was you, Zane. You and Sophie."

Rikki breathed heavily as she finished her brief story. She crossed her arms across her chest and sat down on the other side of the moon pool.

Zane didn't seem shocked. "The gems must have been valuable," he said matter of factly.

"Yeah" Rikki said bitterly. "They were."

Zane nodded. After a few seconds of silence he asked "What happened then?"

Rikki looked at the water, not meeting Zane's gaze. "You changed your mind. You tried to make the other two leave with you. You didn't take any of the jewels."

Now Zane was surprised. He couldn't imagine having his hands on something valuable and just leaving it. That didn't sound like him. At least, not the him that he remembered. Zane watched Rikki carefully, trying to discern whether she was being truthful or not. There was something about seeing her like this, upset, that triggered at his memory. He had seen her angry before. Actually, he had seen her angry a lot. Zane closed his eyes as his brain flickered through flash after flash. They weren't full memories so much as they were snapshots of pieces of them.

Zane slowly opened his eyes. Rikki was looking at him questioningly.

"Your personality." Zane began. "On an ordinary day, describe it for me."

Rikki's eyes narrowed. "How do you mean?"

"I mean", Zane leaned forward towards where she sat, on the other side of the pool. "The way you were just now. Angry. Well..." He corrected himself, "Not angry, incensed."

Rikki blinked at him. "I don't really get what you're asking me," She answered. "Are you really asking if I'm mad all the time?"

To Rikki's surprise, Zane smiled at her. A genuine smile. "I think you just answered my question." He said. There was definitely something familiar about Rikki's tone of voice. He knew he'd heard it before. Probably several times.

"We've fought." He said, startling Rikki. "We've fought quite a bit, haven't we?"

Rikki looked at Zane with wide eyes. "Did you just remember that?"

"A little." The pair locked eyes.

Rikki stood and walked around the pool to sit next to Zane. She sat far enough away from him to keep him from feeling nervous.

"Yes." She said finally. "We've had some pretty big fights."

The words rang true to Zane. "But we've always patched things up, right?"

"Sometimes have been easier than other times." Rikki answered. "We've

been really good lately, though. We haven't fought in a while."

Zane looked at her closely. "By really good, you mean-"

"Really good." Rikki finished. Her voice had a note of sadness to it.

Zane looked at her sideways. He had a sudden desire to reach his arm out around her shoulders and pull her close, but he pushed the urge down. He was still a little uneasy being there with her.

"Tell me about it." He said. "About how you became a... you know." Lewis had told him a few stories, but Zane wanted to hear about everything in Rikki's words.

Rikki spoke slowly, quietly, and calmly. She told him about how the girls had changed in the first place. She told Zane about their powers, and about what they'd been through over the years. She described how Zane had found out, the first time as well as the second time. She spoke for a long time, telling Zane everything she could think of. She told him about Sophie and his history with her.

Zane listened raptly as she spoke, fascinated. Even when Rikki retold stories he's already heard from Lewis, they sounded so different in her words that it felt like he was hearing them for the first time.

Rikki eventually ran to the end of her stories. She told Zane everything, up to the last date they had shared before the accident. After she finished she took a long, deep breath.

"I think that's everything." She said tiredly.

"Wow." Zane whispered.

Rikki smiled a bit. "Wow?" She raised her eyebrows. "That's all you have to say?"

Zane smiled back at her absently, his brain racing to process everything he'd heard. Sophie had been lying to him, he knew it.

Zane took a deep breath before speaking. "Show me." He said nervously.

Rikki gave him a questioning look. "Show you..."

"Your... power. Show me how you heat water." Zane was a bit frightened to see it in person, but his curiosity got the better of him.

Rikki looked at Zane for a moment. He nodded at her, encouraging her. Slowly she reached one hand out over the water and curled her fingers into a tight fist. The water began to bubble and steam beneath her arm. Steam rose out of the pool and into the air. Rikki loosened her fingers and looked at Zane, afraid of what she might see.

Zane was breathing heavily, his eyes as big as plates. He had been prepared for what he was going to see, but it was a shock seeing it

for real. This was magic. Magic was impossible. And yet he'd just seen it with his own two eyes.

"What's it like?" He asked.

"I don't know." Rikki answered sheepishly. "I just do it."

"Is your hand hot?" Zane looked at her fingers.

"No." Rikki reached out without hesitation and took Zane's hand in hers. Her hand was cool in his. "See?"

The tension between the two reached a level so high you could practically touch it. Zane's fingers tingled where they held Rikki's. Zane looked at their entwined fingers thoughtfully before looking back up into Rikki's eyes.

Zane moved a little closer to Rikki, his hand still in hers. Slowly, deliberately, he leaned forward and pressed his lips against hers, softly. He kept one hand gripping Rikki's and the threaded the other hand in Rikki's hair, holding her close to him.

Zane felt warm as he kissed the blonde. This was so familiar to him. It felt good, comfortable. Their lips were soft against each others, yet they were also very firm. The kiss intensified. Zane sat up straight on his knees, gently pulling Rikki up with him so that they could face each other. They each ran one hand over the other's back, leaving one hand tightly holding the other's. Both of them found themselves lost in the other for the moment.

Zane shifted on his knees, holding Rikki tightly. For just a moment she lost her balance, tipping just a bit towards the water.

"Be careful." She said without opening her eyes. She whispered in Zane's ear, "I can't touch the water."

Zane froze where he was. It was way too easy for him to forget what Rikki was. He sat back, trying to keep cool. Mostly trying not to offend her. But he was freaked out. He couldn't help it.

Rikki let him move away from her. She didn't want him to lose it again.

"Listen, Rikki," Zane began, speaking carefully. "Please, try not to get upset with me after I say this."

Rikki's eyes fell. "You don't want to see me anymore." She spoke quietly.

"No, I do want to see you." Zane spoke urgently. "It's just..." His voice trailed off.

Rikki couldn't imagine where Zane might be going with this.

"What?"

"I like you." Zane gave her a small smile. "I do. I barely know you, but being with you feels so good to me. But... I don't know how to say this..." Zane took a deep breath. "I'm having a hard time dealing with the, um, mermaid stuff. I'm trying to get used to it, but I haven't gotten there yet. Could we, do you think we could, maybe, try

to be together, but pretend you're a normal girl? Not a you know?"

Rikki was hurt at his words, but she told herself not to be. Zane wanted to be with her. She could stick out a few more weeks until his memory returned. The thing that made her sad was that Zane didn't like her for her. He only liked part of her. Still, being with him was what she wanted. She hesitantly nodded her head.

"Good. Thank you." Zane said, relieved.

Rikki still had some reservations. "So... you want us to be together, but you want me to pretend like I'm not a mermaid."

Zane nodded.

"Are you sure you don't want to see? In person?" Rikki looked up at Zane hopefully. "It's not as weird as you think it is."

"I'm sorry." Zane meant his words. "I promise I am, I'm just not ready to deal with that stuff yet."

"I understand." Rikki took Zane's hands in hers. "We'll be just a normal couple. I just want to be with you."

Zane kissed Rikki again, gently. Rikki's mind was still preoccupied. She wasn't positive she was alright with this arrangement, but it felt so wonderful to kiss Zane again, she was willing to try to get over it.

10. Good Feelings

The next few days passed quickly for Zane, but they passed terribly slowly for Rikki.

Zane was having a blast. He had put all of the mermaid mess far in the back of his mind. He hadn't thought about it once and he found it easy to just enjoy being with Rikki. They walked together on the beach, they went to dinner. They even spent time with the rest of the group. However, now they watched DVDs at Cleo's house instead of going to Mako like they usually did at night.

Aside from a few awkward silences, usually after Lewis slipped and mentioned something about swimming, Zane found himself relaxed. Comfortable. He enjoyed Rikki's company. She was funny and beautiful. Zane adored their arrangement.

Several chunks of memory had returned to Zane's head. He remembered school, and riding bikes with Nate. He remembered hanging out at the Juicenet cafe with a girl named Miriam. More importantly, he remembered that he hated Miriam.

But the most important thing of all that Zane remembered was the fact that Sophie was not a friend of his. She had called him several times without him answering. Just yesterday, he had sat up like a flash out of his bed, inundated with memories of Sophie and the trouble she'd caused in the past. He knew his instincts had been correct about her. He hadn't talked to her in days, and he didn't really care to.

On the other hand, Rikki felt like the last few days had dragged on and on. She had thought that she would be able to humor Zane, to be with him while she pretended to be a normal human girl, but it was harder than she'd thought it would be.

True, their relationship had never been majorly defined by the fact that she was a mermaid, but it did play a huge part in it. Normally, they spent the majority of their time at Mako island. They swam together frequently. More than anything else, Rikki always appreciated being able to be herself with Zane without having to hide anything. She had to keep herself so shielded from everyone else in the world. She and Zane had a connection that made her incredibly happy, and now she felt like that connection was gone. Yes, they were having fun together, but that spark that made them 'them' just didn't feel like it was there anymore.

"What do you want to watch? Maybe, uh, this one?" Zane held up a pink DVD case with an embracing couple on the cover.

Rikki screwed her face up at the romantic film. She was curled up on the couch in Zane's living room. Zane was on the floor looking through a bookshelf of DVDs.

"A romance?" Rikki said skeptically.

"Ah... I just thought..." Zane sheepishly put the DVD back on the shelf. He sat back and turned to Rikki. "I just thought maybe we could put in a chick flick and curl up under the blankets?"

Rikki nodded, an innocent smirk on her face. "Curling up and watching a movie I'm fine with. But unless you want to clean up puke, no chick flicks."

Zane furrowed his brow at her. "You...don't like romantic films?"

"Do I look like a girl who likes romantic films?" Rikki asked.

Zane kept searching through titles. He had thought he'd score some 'romantic boyfriend' points by suggesting a girlie movie. He remembered dating girls before Rikki who had simply melted when he told them that, 'yes of course, he loved Orlando Bloom too'.

"How about this one?" Zane held up a copy of a battered movie. "It's, ah, Dead Poet's Society? It looks pretty well-worn."

"I gave it to you." Rikki said quietly.

"Oh." Zane set the movie on the floor and looked at Rikki in silence for a few seconds.

Zane sat up and walked on his knees over to where Rikki was laying on the couch. He folded his hands and placed them on the couch with his chin resting on them. He looked deep into Rikki's eyes.

"You ok?" He asked. Rikki had been quiet all day and Zane was starting to get concerned.

Rikki gave Zane a smile that disappeared too quickly. "Of course." She said nonchalantly. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"No, really." Zane had seen how quickly Rikki's smile had faded from her face. "What's wrong?"

Rikki just shook her head. "Let's watch the movie." She said. "I'll bet you don't remember it." She poked Zane in the ribs.

"Haha, very funny." Zane turned the case over in his hands. Truth was that he didn't remember it. Still, Rikki said it was their favorite?

Rikki and Zane watched the movie, wrapped in each other's arms. Occasionally Zane would sneak a look down at Rikki, but each time she looked distant, as if she wasn't watching the movie at all.

Rikki found herself deep in thought during the film. Did she really want to be with Zane if she couldn't be herself?

The credits rolled. Zane leaned in for a kiss. Rikki indulged him for a few seconds before pulling her face away from his.

"Did you like it?" Rikki asked nonchalantly as she sat up.

"It was wonderful." Zane said truthfully as he leaned back in for another kiss.

Rikki casually dodged Zane's kiss, standing up off the couch.

"It's late. I'd better be going." Rikki pulled on the light jacket she'd brought with her.

Zane checked his watch. "It's eight thirty?" He said questioningly.

"Yeah. I've gotta help my dad with the, um, the wash." Rikki said quickly.

"Ok." Zane said, slightly confused.

Zane walked Rikki to the front door. He pulled it open and let her walk out first before he followed her. They started the walk back to Rikki's walked side-by-side but didn't touch. It was a few minutes before either of them spoke.

"Ok." Zane spoke determinedly. "Please, Rikki. What's wrong? Tell me."

Rikki stopped walking, a few paces past Zane. She didn't turn to face him.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Rikki spoke as she looked down at her hands.

Zane quickly walked to stand directly in front of Rikki. "You've been acting odd all day. Tell me what's wrong? So I can fix it?"

"It's nothing, Zane." Rikki pushed past him and kept walking towards her house.

"No," Zane jogged to keep up with Rikki. "Something is wrong, I can

tell. Talk to me."

"I can't." Rikki said as she continued walking briskly.

"Wait, wait, Rikki." Zane caught her hand, pulling her to a stop.
"You can talk to me about anything, please."

Rikki stopped walking for just a second. Her face steeled. "No. Zane, I can't talk to you about... anything."

"Wha-" Zane stopped walking abruptly. He had a feeling he knew what this was all about.

Rikki kept walking towards home. Zane, once again, caught her by the arm and stopped her.

"Rikki?" Zane whispered. "Is this about all of the..." Zane swallowed. "You know?"

"The you know..." Rikki muttered as she tried to walk on.

Zane forced himself to remember the mermaid business, for the first time in several days. "You want to talk about the weird stuff?"

Rikki's eyes watered. "You didn't always think it was so weird." She said, upset, as she shrugged Zane away from her and kept walking.

Zane watched her walk away, and as he did he had the strangest feeling. He couldn't bear to see her walk away from him.

"Rikki!" He shouted as he sprinted after her. All he wanted to do was stop her from leaving him.

"Listen," He started. "What if I tried... to... not be weirded out?"

Rikki stopped walking. "What do you mean?"

Zane darted quickly to stand in front of Rikki. "What if I tried, really hard, to see it. To see you change."

Rikki stopped, and examined Zane carefully. "You're saying that you think you'll be ok with seeing me as a mermaid?"

Zane swallowed. He was surprised the words had even come out of his mouth. Truthfully, he was far from sure that he was alright with seeing Rikki turn into a fish. It still really freaked him out. But... he really didn't want Rikki to leave him. He cared for her deeply and he was willing to try to accept her.

"I'm saying I'm willing to try." Zane said slowly, waiting to feel nervous. The feeling didn't come.

Rikki's face brightened a bit. "Really? You won't be freaked out?"

Zane shook his head, still uncertain. "I care for you, Rikki. So much." Zane took Rikki's hands in his.

Rikki tried to not to feel too relieved or too excited. Zane had been so careful not to mention anything mermaid related over the last several days. This was a really huge step.

"Tomorrow?" Rikki said hopefully. "Maybe we can go to Mako?"

Zane was waiting to get freaked out at all the talk about magic. As of yet, he was feeling pretty good about it, which surprised him.

Zane nodded at Rikki with a smile.

Rikki threw her arms around Zane's neck and hugged him tightly. Zane wrapped his arms around Rikki's waist and squeezed her to him.

"Thank you," Rikki said, grinning. She gave Zane a hard kiss before they continued on their walk to Rikki's home.

Zane walked home after kissing Rikki goodbye on her doorstep. He took a slight detour down to the water and stood at the edge of the dock, looking out over the waves.

He looked hard at the water. Was Cleo out there swimming right now? Zane shook his head. He felt good about tomorrow. He had expected to be nervous and freaked out, but so far he was still calm. And he still cared for Rikki.

Tomorrow was going to be a good thing for both of them, right?

Zane walked the rest of the way home with his hands in his pockets and a grin on his face.

11. Fixing?

The next day came quickly. Zane awoke refreshed and excited. He had a good feeling about today. All night he had waited for the feeling to come. The feeling where he felt totally overwhelmed and nervous. But he had woken up feeling great. He was nuts for Rikki and he knew that today was going to be great for both of them.

Rikki was the one who woke up nervous. She was terrified of scaring Zane. They'd been doing well the last few days and Rikki desperately didn't want to make him run away from her. Rikki looked in her mirror and took a deep breath. She could do this.

The pair met at the dock at 10am. They walked up to each other shyly, as if this was their first date.

"Hey." Rikki said breathlessly.

"Hey." Zane echoed her.

The pair looked at each other in silence for a few more seconds before Rikki spoke up. "Are you ready to head out there?"

Zane nodded, a goofy smile on his face. He was excited for this. He walked toward his boat and climbed inside. He noticed that Rikki

hadn't followed him aboard. He turned to look back at her.

"Aren't you coming?" He asked curiously.

Rikki still stood on the dock awkwardly. "How about I meet you there?" She suggested. She didn't want to risk getting splashed and transforming in the boat on the way over.

Zane realized what she was concerned about. "Oh...right. Yeah, sure. That's fine." Zane gave Rikki an encouraging smile.

"Meet you on the beach at Mako?" Rikki said cautiously. She was still trying to be careful of Zane's feelings.

"Sounds great." Zane spoke easily, giving Rikki a smile that made her knees buckle.

Rikki nodded, satisfied. She walked a bit further down the dock, and out of Zane's sight, before she dove into the waves. She swam quickly over to the coast of the familiar island that she and Zane had spent so many hours at.

Zane started the boat's motor and began his own trip to Mako. He, once again, checked his thoughts. He still felt great. No reservations, no major nerves. He had to remind himself that he was on his way to a strange island to watch his girlfriend magically change into a fish. Maybe it hadn't hit him yet? He still felt fine. And he wasn't complaining.

Rikki was waiting for Zane on the sandy beach as he arrived. Zane pulled his boat far enough up the beach to anchor it before turning to Rikki.

"You ready for this?" He spoke loud enough to be heard over the crashing ocean.

Rikki raised her eyebrows. "Are you?"

Zane answered by taking her hand in his. He squeezed it tightly.

"Come on." Rikki said with a small smile.

Rikki led Zane through the forest of trees. It was a long path, but Zane walked it as if he was familiar with the trek. Eventually, the pair arrived at the above-ground entrance to the moon pool.

"Be careful." Rikki advised Zane as he peered down into the tunnel that led into the cavernous moon pool.

One after another, they tumbled down the slippery tunnel, landing in the room that led into the moon pool.

Zane looked around in wonder. He'd never seen a place like this before. Rikki took his hand and led him up the short set of stairs and into the moon pool.

Zane stepped inside the cavern and looked around in silence for several seconds. He was speechless. This place was incredible. The walls stretched so high it looked like they went on forever. In the

center of the pool was a circular body of crystal blue water. The cave had a silence to it that raised the hair on Zane's arms.

"Wow." He breathed, taking it all in.

Rikki stepped in after him. She watched Zane's face as he looked around the moon pool. He looked so curious, so happy. Rikki tried to stop herself from smiling, but she couldn't quite do it.

Zane completed his tour around the moon cavern and turned back to look at Rikki. She had a silly smile on her face. Zane stepped up close to her, matching her silly smile with one of his own.

"Are you doing alright?" Rikki looked up into Zane's eyes.

"Never better." Zane said quietly back. And he meant it.

The moon pool seemed magical, even though it wasn't anywhere close to a full moon. Zane gently placed his hands on Rikki's shoulders. Slowly, he pulled her close to him for a kiss.

Rikki returned Zane's kiss, letting the passion build a bit before she pulled her face back reluctantly.

Zane looked at Rikki questioningly as she ended their kiss.

"I'm sorry." Rikki apologized for pulling back. "But if I don't do this soon I might just die of nervousness."

It hadn't occurred to Zane that Rikki might be feeling nervous. He quickly stepped back to give Rikki space.

"So... this is it?" Zane said raspily. He still wasn't scared, but nerves had begun to make themselves present.

"This is it." Rikki looked directly into Zane's eyes as she spoke seriously.

Rikki sat on her knees at the edge of the pool. She patted the ground beside her, gesturing for Zane to sit down beside her.

Zane lowered himself onto the sand beside Rikki. The anticipation was so solid he could practically cut it with a knife.

"Zane," Rikki started a speech she'd been practicing all morning. "Are you sure you're ready for this? Because if you aren't, just say the word. We'll go back home, we'll pretend this never happened."

Zane held up one hand, silencing Rikki. "I'm ready." He breathed.

Rikki gave Zane a small nod, the smile gone from her face. She was terrified.

"How does it happen?" Zane was looking up at Rikki seriously, breaking her from her thoughts.

Rikki stood, gesturing for Zane to remain seated. She walked to stand at the other side of the pool, where Zane could see her

clearly.

Rikki gave herself one more mental pep talk and stepped to the edge of the pool. She locked eyes with Zane. His eyes looked so solid, so confident. With one more deep breath, Rikki stepped off the edge and into the pool, fully submerging herself in the water.

Rikki surfaced quickly and paddled over to Zane.

Zane was watching expectantly. "Nothing happened?" His brow furrowed curiously.

"Just give it a second." Rikki said breathlessly.

No sooner had the words left her mouth than the water began to change around her.

Zane watched, wide eyed, as Rikki's long, toned legs transformed into a long golden fin. Her clothes disappeared and her entire body changed.

Zane was breathing heavily as Rikki looked at him over the side of the pool.

"Well?" Rikki said breathlessly, hopefully, as she watched Zane's reaction.

Zane looked at Rikki. She had a long, golden fin instead of legs. Zane tried desperately to find the right words to say, but he couldn't quite get there.

"I-uh, I mean- you-" He choked out.

Rikki's face fell. "I've scared you." She said glumly. "It's ok, I'll go."

"No, stop." Zane caught Rikki's hand and stopped her from swimming away.

Rikki looked at Zane's hand, holding hers, and looked up at Zane hopefully.

"You aren't... scared?" She managed, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice.

"I'm not scared." Zane spoke calmly. Yes, his heart was jumping practically out of his chest, but he wasn't scared of Rikki. He took a deep breath. "I can handle it."

Rikki's face warmed. "You know, you told me those same words the last time you found out."

Zane took her other hand in his, holding onto her tightly. He felt some nervousness building in him, but looking into Rikki's eyes made it all disappear.

Zane leaned forward carefully, til he was eye level with Rikki. "You look beautiful." He whispered.

Zane thought to himself hard. Did he mean his words or was he just

trying to make Rikki feel better? No matter how hard he thought about it, he kept coming to the conclusion that, yes, he did mean exactly what he was saying.

Zane sat up and swung his feet over the edge of the pool and into the water. Hesitantly, he lowered himself into the warm water with Rikki.

Rikki quickly backed up, holding herself a few feet away from Zane. She didn't want to overwhelm him.

Zane's hand reached out quickly to take Rikki's hand in his. He pulled her right up close to him as he looked deeply into her eyes.

Rikki found herself breathless in the water. Was it possible that this nightmare was finally over?

Zane placed his other hand behind Rikki's neck and pulled her face to his. He kissed her softly, giving her time to pull back if she wanted to.

Rikki didn't want to. She kissed Zane eagerly, more than a little relieved at how well he was handling things.

Things heated up quickly between the pair, and soon they found their hands wandering over each other's bodies.

Zane ran his hands up and down Rikki's back, feeling where the top of her fin melded smoothly into the skin of her back.

Rikki's hands explored Zane's abs, enjoying the feel of the hard muscles in her hands.

"Rikki," Zane started. He wanted to ask her a question he'd been curious about for weeks now, but he wasn't sure this was the right time. But was there ever a right time?

Their hands continued their trip over each other's bodies.

"Rikki?" Zane started again. "Have you and I ever... Well, have we-you know... ever?" His voice trailed off as he looked at Rikki meaningfully.

"Oh!" Rikki realized what Zane was asking her. "Um, well, yeah. We have."

"Ah," Zane really wished he could remember those memories. "Well, good to know."

After a small awkward silence the pair continued their exploration of each other.

Still moving slowly, Rikki put her hand behind Zane's neck and pulled her face towards his.

Zane didn't fight her. Slowly, his lips met hers.

That's when it happened.

Zane felt his memories start to return to him, but they weren't the memories that he expected to feel.

It was as if a movie was playing behind Zane's eyelids, and no matter how hard he tried to stop it, he couldn't.

The memory was of him and Rikki, sitting in the forest. Through the fuzzy memory, Zane remembered Rikki leaning forward to kiss him. The second their lips touched, Zane felt his face grow hot and then he felt himself losing consciousness.

Zane, scared, jerked himself back into the present and tried to ignore the memories he was feeling, but they kept on coming.

The next memory was brief. He and Rikki were standing in the cafe next to a bouquet of balloons. Right in front of him, Rikki raised one hand, closed it, and caused all of the balloons by Zane's head to explode.

Zane gasped with surprise. The memory frightened him.

"Is everything alright?" Rikki looked at him, concerned.

"Everything is fine." Zane's thoughts were racing. What exactly was he remembering? Is this the way Rikki really was?

Zane felt another memory coming on. He tried to suppress it, but it pushed through anyway.

This one found Rikki and him standing in an office. Zane was talking to Rikki, though he couldn't make out what he was saying to her.

Rikki said something, and all of a sudden, all of the power in the office cut out, plunging the place into darkness.

When the lights came back on, Rikki had disappeared.

Zane gasped as he found himself back in the present, back in the moon pool with Rikki. He swallowed hard as he pulled back away from her.

"What can you do?" He stammered, terrified.

"What do you mean?" Rikki looked at Zane, confused.

Zane placed his hands at the edge of the pool, quickly pulling himself out. He spoke almost breathlessly.

"You made me pass out." He stammered. "And you explode things. And you make the power go out."

Rikki tried to figure out what Zane was saying, but he took her completely off guard. "What?" She managed.

Zane stood up out of the water. All of the nerves he had been waiting to feel seemed to hit him at once. Rikki was magic. Who knew what kind of magic she'd already worked on him.

"I'm sorry." Zane stammered, backing up. "I thought I could handle

this. I can't"

And with that, Zane turned on his heel and took off out of the cave. His head was so filled with thoughts that he couldn't filter anything out. He just knew that he needed to get out of here.

Now.

12. Breaking

Sorry! This is the right chapter! Ah!

* * *

><p>Zane tore through the trees. It didn't even occur to him to think of which direction he was going, his feet just carried him towards the beach automatically. His mind was flashing, he couldn't seem to focus on any one thought.<p>

He was scared. He was scared of Rikki. And, more than he wanted to admit, he was scared of how much he still wanted to be with her. Zane stopped running for just a second and leaned against a tree, breathing hard. He held his head in his hands as if he could make it stop spinning. He couldn't.

Zane allowed himself only a few seconds before he continued on his way to his boat, as fast as he could move. He needed to get out of there.

Magic wasn't real. Mermaids didn't exist. Zane had grown up knowing both of those statements as facts. And yet, here he was, alone on an island with a magical mermaid. Zane needed to get as far away as possible, and he needed to get there soon.

As Zane ran, more memories continued to surface. Zane didn't take the time to think about any of them, he just ran.

Rikki found herself alone in the pool. Tears welled up in her eyes. No matter how hard she tried to hold them back, they began pouring down her face.

Rikki allowed herself to sink beneath the water as she fell apart. She didn't chase after Zane. She didn't want to. In all truthfulness, Rikki was exhausted. She'd been working so hard, so constantly, trying to make Zane love her again. Just when she thought she'd gotten there, he'd run away scared.

Rikki didn't have anything left to fight with. Her spirit was completely gone. Zane didn't love her. They'd waited weeks and his memory of her hadn't returned.

Rikki punched the water angrily. Zane remembered Nate. He remembered Lewis. He even remembered where their favorite table at the cafe was. But he didn't remember her.

The water got darker as Rikki sank. Eventually, she pushed herself back up to the surface, taking in a deep gulp of air.

Rikki thought hard about what to do, but in the end she just decided

to go home. She was done trying to force Zane to care for her. It hurt too much.

Swimming slowly, Rikki made her way back to the main land. After drying herself off, she walked towards her home, deep in thought.

Zane was also walking as he thought. He turned the corner, headed towards his house, when he walked straight into somebody.

"Sorry." Zane muttered as he kept walking on.

"Zane?" A happy voice exclaimed behind him.

Zane reluctantly turned around to see who had called out to him. To his dismay, a familiar red head came bouncing up to him.

"I haven't heard from you in ages!" Sophie exclaimed.

"I'm not in the mood." Zane said blearily as he pushed past her and kept walking briskly.

Sophie easily caught up with him. "Of course you are." She said confidently. "I haven't heard from you in ages, you know."

"Yeah, I do." Zane kept walking, looking straight ahead.

Sophie followed close behind him. "I thought maybe we could get a coffee?"

"I don't think so." Zane didn't look at Sophie as he marched on.

Sophie stopped walking, huffily. "It's Rikki, isn't it?" She asked, frustrated. "She's made you mad yet again."

Zane stopped walking. Reluctantly, he turned around to look at Sophie.

"Again?" Zane took one step closer to Sophie. She's made me angry many times before?"

Sophie rolled her eyes as she marched to stand even with Zane. "Of course she has. You two fight like cats and dogs. You've told me out about it."

Zane examined Sophie closely, trying to determine if she was telling the truth or not. He knew that he and Rikki had fought in the past, but he didn't know much about it. Rikki hadn't given him details. After a few seconds of looking at Sophie Zane clenched his jaw, shook his head, and turned to begin walking away.

"You're lying." Zane said bitterly as he walked.

"What?" Sophie held her hands up. "Are you serious?" Sophie quickly followed Zane, matching him step for step. "You two ARE constantly fighting."

Zane kept walking briskly. "Really?" He said sarcastically. "What about, Sophie?"

He didn't believe a word that was coming out of Sophie's mouth. there was no way that she knew more about his relationship with Rikki than he did. Rikki would have told him if they had fought over something important.

"You fight over Will." Sophie said triumphantly. "You think he likes Rikki and you two fight over it constantly.

"Your brother?" Zane raised his eyebrows. He had a hard time believing that. Will had seemed pretty into Bella when Zane had spent time with him over the last few days.

Zane kept walking. Sophie paused for just a second, taken aback that Zane didn't remember how much he hated her brother. Or had hated him in the past. She quickly regrouped herself and caught up with Zane.

"There were plenty of other fights too." She said quickly.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Sophie." Zane said wearily.

Sophie narrowed her eyes. "I know that you two fight all the time about how much time she spends out on Mako island." She said with a smirk.

Zane didn't stop walking, but he did slow down.

Sophie could see that she'd caught his attention. With an innocent smile that almost looked devilish she continued speaking. "Yeah," She said causally. "All the time, fighting because she would rather spend her time at that boring old island than spend it with you."

Sophie had no idea if that was really the reason they fought over Mako or not, but she did know that they fought over the time Rikki spent over there. Plus, Zane looked to be really deep in thought over Sophie's words, so she must have said something right.

Zane's head hurt so bad he was seeing spots. How much did Sophie know? Zane rubbed his temples as he walked along, thoughtfully. More than anything, he wanted someone to talk to about all this. Every instinct was telling him to stay far away from Sophie, but it would feel so good to confide in someone. And she did seem to know something about the situation. She might be able to tell him something that could help him. But could he trust her?

"I need some time to think." Zane looked at Sophie pointedly.

"What? You want me to go?" Sophie asked incredulously.

"Yes." Zane said firmly as he continued walking.

The truth was, Zane wasn't actually positive that he wanted Sophie to go. She was a touch of reality that Zane really felt like he needed. Didn't he have a right to be able to talk to someone about his problems? Still, he walked briskly away from Sophie, leaving her standing on the walkway alone.

Zane was still thinking hard when he reached the front door to his

home. He made his decision as he stepped in the front door. Quickly, before he could change his mind, he pulled his phone from his pocket and dialed a number determinedly.

"Hey." Zane didn't wait for a response on the other line. "Can you be at my house in ten minutes? Good."

Zane flipped the phone shut, still unsure if he was doing the right thing. All he knew was that he desperately needed someone to talk to. But was this the right person? The next ten minutes seemed to stretch out forever.

The doorbell rang, shocking Zane quickly out of his thoughts. Shakily, he walked to the front door and pulled it open.

"Thanks for coming." Zane calmed almost instantly at the sight of the person on the other side of the door. He had made the right decision.

"No problem." Lewis said easily as he stepped into the house.

Zane couldn't believe the amount of relief he felt as his friend walked through the front door. The pair sat down in the living room, Lewis in the squashy armchair and Zane on the couch.

Lewis listened for a long time as Zane spoke.

Zane talked to Lewis openly. He couldn't remember ever being so honest with anyone before, but once he started talking to Lewis he found it hard to stop.

Zane talked to him about how hard he was finding it to understand and be ok with all of this mermaid business. He told him how much he liked Rikki, but human Rikki. He just didn't think he could be with her if she was a fish. He vented about Sophie, and about how much he had wanted to talk to her about all this, but he knew she wasn't trustworthy.

Lewis nodded in agreement at that.

Finally, Zane spent a long time talking about how frustrated he was. He wasn't used to being this powerless. The time had passed, and he was still missing enormous chunks of his memory. He'd been back to the doctor, the swelling was gone. Now it was just a waiting game.

"How do you handle all of this so well?" Zane looked up at Lewis, who was still seated comfortably in the big black armchair. "I mean, the mermaids and stuff. It doesn't even seem like it bothers you?"

"You know, I don't think it does bother me." Lewis answered calmly.

Zane raised his eyebrows. "It doesn't?"

Lewis leaned forward in his chair as he explained. "I've known Cleo for... well, for as long as I can remember. And I've been in love with her for almost as long. I don't think there's anything she could tell me that would scare me away."

"Wow man." Zane looked down. "I'm glad for you."

Lewis gave a small laugh. "It doesn't hurt, either, that I've always been interested in the paranormal and fantasy and all that. Deep down I think I've always been waiting for something extraordinary in my life. Like the girls."

Zane looked at Lewis piercingly. "And it doesn't bother you, Cleo being what she is?"

"No. I love her." Lewis answered simply.

Zane sank into the couch, deep in thought. Maybe that was the problem. He didn't love her. But he had tried to love her...

"I can't help it." Zane said exasperatedly. "I just can't get used to the idea of Rikki being a fish."

"Mermaid." Lewis corrected.

"Ok, half fish." Zane said bitterly.

"But all Rikki." Lewis answered quietly. "Even as a mermaid, it's 100% Rikki."

"I'm sorry." Zane looked at the floor. "I've tried to be ok with it, really I have. I just can't get there."

Lewis nodded, trying not to show how disappointed he was.

"So what now?" Lewis asked.

Zane shook his head slowly. "I don't know."

Rikki had been at Cleo's house for the past several hours, pouring her heart out in a similar way to the way Zane was pouring his out to Lewis. She didn't think she could be with Zane if she couldn't be herself. It just didn't feel right. It felt like she was being fake all the time, and she didn't like it.

"I just can't do this anymore." Rikki spoke to Cleo quietly.

Cleo pulled her friend in for a tight hug. "It's going to be ok," she said comfortingly.

"No it isn't." Rikki said matter of factly. "It isn't going to be ok. Zane is gone. My Zane is gone."

Cleo looked at Rikki sympathetically. She didn't know what to do for her. Cleo took just a second to remind herself how lucky she was to have Lewis. The thought comforted her, but it certainly didn't do much for Rikki.

For the second time that day, Rikki felt her face grow hot as her eyes watered with tears. She buried her face in Cleo's neck and dissolved into tears. Rikki wasn't usually this vulnerable, but the thought of losing Zane crippled her.

"I thought Zane and I would be together forever." Rikki managed to choke out.

Cleo couldn't think of anything to say, so she just patted Rikki's head and held her tightly.

Rikki ended up spending the night at Cleo's house, and Lewis ended up staying the night at Zane's. Neither Zane nor Rikki wanted to be alone that night, though neither of them would ever admit it.

The next morning, Rikki woke with a calm but serious expression on her face. She walked downstairs to find Cleo making breakfast.

Cleo looked up as Rikki waled into the kitchen. "How many pancakes would you like?" Cleo asked cheerily. "Two? Three?"

"None, thanks." Rikki spoke calmly.

Cleo narrowed her eyes as she looked at Rikki. "You aren't hungry?" She questioned.

"No." Rikki strode to the kitchen door that led outside. "I'll call you later." She said before she stepped out the door and started walking down the street.

Rikki walked purposefully towards Zane's house. She knew what she needed to say to him, even if it wasn't what she really wanted to.

Rikki marched up the front stairs to Zane's large home confidently and rang the bell. It was a few seconds before the door opened.

"Lewis?" Rikki was surprised, she'd known that Lewis had gone to Zane's, but she hadn't known that he was still there.

Lewis stepped quietly out onto the front porch, pulling the door shut behind him tightly before he spoke.

"Are you alright?" He asked, concerned.

"No." Rikki spoke as calmly as she could manage. "But I need to speak with Zane."

"Oh, well he's still sleeping." Lewis said apologetically.

"Is he?" Rikki's eyebrows disappeared into her hairline. So Zane was getting wonderful, full night rests? He must be really torn up over things. Rikki's thoughts were bitter. She's barely slept a wink last night.

Lewis quickly picked up on Rikki's agitation. "You know, he was up really late." Lewis covered. "Talking about you, mostly."

"Yeah, I'll bet." The statement did not make Rikki feel any better. "Get me a pen and paper?"

Zane lay in his bed staring at the ceiling, as he had all night. He hadn't gotten a single minute of sleep. He knew he should get up, but he was trying to get a little bit more thinking time in before he went downstairs. He heard someone come to the door, but he assumed it wasn't important when a few minutes went by without his being

disturbed.

Zane padded down the steps about thirty minutes later. Lewis was in the kitchen drinking a mug of coffee.

"Ah, this is for you." Lewis awkwardly held a piece of folded note paper out to Zane.

Zane narrowed his eyes as he took it. 'Zane.' It said simply on the outside.

"It's from Rikki." Lewis gave Zane a meaningful look before walking out of the kitchen, and leaving Zane to read the note alone.

13. Alone

Zane sat down in a kitchen chair. He didn't unfold the note right away, he just looked at his name on the front. He felt like a memory was trying to reach his brain and he closed his eyes, trying to focus on it. Before he could get ahold of it, the memory slipped away.

Zane unfolded the piece of notebook paper. Familiar handwriting filled the page. Zane read to himself silently.

'Z,

I can't do this anymore. I can't keep waiting for you. I completely understand why you're having such a hard time accepting all of this, really I do. It's a lot to take in. It isn't fair for me to expect you to automatically be all right with everything in such a short amount of time, so I'm letting you go.

Zane, I've been in love with you for a long time. Someday, I hope you'll remember how much you used to love me. I think it's better for both of us if we just leave things where they are. I need to accept the fact that sometimes things change that we cannot control. I expect that you'll find yourself relieved. Go out, have fun with Nate, keep up your friendship with Lewis, but don't contact me. Don't call me, don't try to communicate with me. It hurts too much.

I'm sorry to do this through a note. I had intended to talk to you about all of this, to see what you had to say. But the truth is that I don't want to know what you would have said. If you asked me not to go I might be too weak to leave you, and if you agree with me then I would have left here heartbroken.

Don't stress, and don't worry about me. Just forget I ever tried to make you remember me, it shouldn't be too hard for you. Date other girls. Fall in love with someone. Enjoy your life. I will enjoy mine. And don't worry, you don't need to think any more about anything out of the ordinary or unexplainable. All I ask of you is that you don't tell anyone what you've seen or what you know, but I trust that you won't say anything to anyone.

I'm sure I'll see you around. And if I don't, please know that what we had was real, even if you don't remember it.

R.'

Zane read the note once, and then read it again.

He sat back in the kitchen chair, letting the note drop onto the table in front of him.

Lewis came walking into the kitchen slowly, trying to get a feel for what Zane was thinking. He took a seat across the table from Zane and waited for Zane to speak first.

Several seconds went by before Zane opened his mouth. "She's done with me." He said quietly, looking at the note on the table.

Lewis nodded. He'd expected as much, though hearing it confirmed made him feel bad.

Zane looked up at Lewis. "She doesn't want to see me anymore."

Lewis picked up the note delicately and gave it a cursory read-through. "I see" He said softly.

Lewis looked up at Zane, who was still staring at a spot on the table in front of him. He didn't move for several seconds. "Are you ok?" He asked concernedly.

"I'm waiting." Zane said.

Lewis waited a few seconds, but Zane didn't elaborate.

"Waiting for..." Lewis led.

"Waiting to feel upset." Zane said blankly. "I'm waiting to feel sorry to lose Rikki."

Lewis examined Zane closely, surprised that Zane didn't feel upset over Rikki's letter. "You... don't care? That she dumped you?"

"I mean," Zane shrugged. "I'll miss having her around, but I'm not heartbroken. Or sad at all, really."

Lewis stood up. He couldn't believe Zane could sound so cold. He'd expected him to be falling apart over Rikki's letter. And here he was, seeming fine.

"I think I'll head out." Lewis said glumly.

Zane looked up for the first time in several minutes. "You're leaving?"

"Yeah." Lewis said distractedly. "I need to get out of here for a while." Lewis started for the front door.

"Hey." Zane stopped him. He looked at Lewis awkwardly. "We're still, I mean, I'm not trying to be weird here, but--"

"Yeah." Lewis nodded. "We're fine. I'll talk to you later." Lewis walked slowly to the front door and stepped outside, shutting the door firmly behind him.

Zane sat by himself in silence, still waiting to feel something,

anything, after reading Rikki's letter. It wasn't that he didn't like Rikki. No, he had liked her a whole lot. But, sitting at that table, he just didn't feel the disappointment that he expected to feel.

After a few more minutes of sitting there, Zane stood up and headed upstairs to take a shower. After he dressed he called Nate and made plans to hang out with him. Zane walked out the front door feeling happy, and looking forward to spending the day with his best friend.

Rikki had spent her time after leaving Zane's sitting on the beach. She looked out over the water, trying to put the past behind her. Zane was gone, and it didn't look like he was ever coming back. She took her time, allowing herself as much time as she needed to lay her hopes to rest. All of her hopes, all of her dreams for hers and Zane's future together, had to be put away.

Rikki heard footsteps walk up behind her on the sand. She turned around, hoping that maybe Zane had come to chase after her. Her face fell when she saw Cleo standing there.

"Oh. It's you." She said glumly.

"It's me." Cleo sat down beside her friend.

Rikki heard a second pair of feet walk up behind her. Bella sat down quietly at Rikki's other side.

"And me." Bella said.

The three of them sat quietly for several minutes, looking out over the ocean.

"Do you want to swim out to Mako for a bit?" Cleo spoke up quietly.

Rikki shook her head. "No." She said coldly. "I don't want to swim anywhere." The tone in her voice made Cleo narrow her eyes.

"It might make you feel better," Bella pushed gently.

"No, it won't." Rikki's harsh tone surprised Bella and Cleo, who exchanged glances.

"I'm sorry," Rikki apologized. "I'm not mad at you two, I shouldn't be taking it out on you. I think I just need to be alone for a bit."

Bella and Cleo met eyes.

"Ok..." Bella said hesitantly.

"You do know we're here if you need us." Cleo squeezed Rikki's arm as she stood up. "And don't expect us not to check in on you."

Bella stood with Cleo and the pair walked away slowly, occasionally turning back to check on Rikki, who hadn't moved. She just sat there, staring stonily out over the water.

"I with I knew what she was thinking." Bella whispered to Cleo, who nodded in agreement as they walked.

Rikki didn't want to talk to anyone about what she was thinking about, she didn't even want to admit to herself the thoughts that were going through her head. The truth was that, in spite of herself, Rikki was embarrassed. For the first time in her life, she was embarrassed to be a mermaid, and she couldn't stand it.

Rikki had never been short on confidence. If someone had a problem with her, they could either suck it up or jump off a bridge for all she cared. But Rikki kept picturing the way Zane had looked at her in the moon pool. He had looked sooo... disgusted. He had never looked at Rikki that way before, and Rikki could not get the image out of her head, no matter how hard she tried.

Rikki shook her head hard, trying to shake herself out of it. What was she thinking? If Zane didn't like her the way she was then to hell with him. She could do better.

She buried her head in her hands. She didn't want to do any better. She wanted Zane. The old Zane. Rikki couldn't just sit and wait to see if maybe his memories returned. Maybe they would, maybe they wouldn't, but Rikki didn't think she could stand to just sit by and wait. It was too rough on her emotions.

Rikki sat alone on the beach for another solid hour, trying to convince herself not to let Zane get to her. She reminded herself how much she loved being a mermaid, how much she liked being a part of the water. Who cares what Zane thinks? Deep down, Rikki wasn't really ok with things, but after an hour spent deep in thought she managed to bury her insecurities relatively deep in her mind.

Rikki stood up, working out her sore muscles and brushing sand off of her shorts. She took a deep breath and pulled out her phone. It lit up in her hand before she could dial a number.

Rikki's face managed a slight smile. "Cleo." She said to herself.

Rikki flipped the phone open. "Yes." She said in a humoring tone.

"Hey Rikki," Cleo's tentative voice came from the other line.

"It's ok." Rikki tried to make herself sound casual. "I'm better now."

"Oh good." Rikki could hear Cleo's smile through the phone. "Do you want to come over?"

"No." Rikki shook her head. "Let's go out somewhere. I want to do something."

Cleo thought hard. Normally she would suggest going to Rikki's cafe, but under the circumstances that didn't seem like such a good plan.

"How about we go to Rascal's?" She suggested.

Rascal's was kind of like a grown up Chuckie Cheese's. It had games and tokens and delicious food, and a crowd of kids older than 16.

"That sounds great." Rikki said, relieved. She hadn't been to Rascal's in forever. It would be a good way to take her mind off things.

"Great." Cleo sounded pleased. "I'll call Bella. Meet there in an hour?"

"Absolutely." Rikki's tone sounded pleased, though she was still trying to pull herself together.

Bella met Rikki as she stepped outside her front door.

"You look lovely!" Bella exclaimed as Rikki stepped out her front door.

"Thank you." Rikki said modestly as she smoothed the short green dress she was wearing.

Cleo met them on their walk to the eatery. Rikki started off the evening quiet, but by the time they got to the eatery she was laughing and smiling.

That smile faded as the three girls walked inside. There, at the biggest dart board, stood Zane and Nate. They were laughing and smiling about a game they had just played. Zane looked as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"No way..." Cleo breathed.

"Of all the places they could go..." Bella whispered.

"It's fine." Rikki said firmly.

"What?" Cleo and Bella said together.

"I said, it's fine." Rikki said firmly but kindly. She was determined not to let Zane see how upset she was.

The girls made their way to the dance floor. Bella and Cleo were still watching Rikki closely, but Rikki seemed to be pretty normal.

In reality, Rikki was falling apart. She kept trying to ignore Zane, but she couldn't seem to look away from him.

Zane couldn't keep himself from looking at Rikki either. She looked so beautiful in that green dress.

'No,' Zane reminded himself. She's not human.

Still, Zane found himself looking for her.

"I'll be right back." Rikki excused herself, stepping away to head towards the restrooms.

As she moved down the small hall she bumped into someone in the

dark.

"Excuse me." She said quickly.

"No... Excuse me." Came a familiar voice.

Rikki looked up into Zane's eyes.

"Oh." She breathed. "It's you."

Zane found himself unable to speak as he looked into Rikki's eyes.

14. Trying to forget

"Wow..." Zane said without quite meaning to.

Rikki looked into Zane's eyes, lost for just a second. Instantly, she snapped herself out of it and dropped her eyes. Ducking her head, she walked briskly down the hall towards the lady's room.

"Wait, Rikki-" Zane called after her, but she didn't turn around. The restroom door slammed shut behind her.

Zane waited for a few minutes to see if Rikki would come back out, but she didn't reappear. Shaking his head, Zane turned to head back to Nate. He didn't know what he was doing. What if Rikki did come back out? What did he have to say to her?

Zane walked slowly, feeling as if he was walking through cement. Each step further from Rikki seemed to be harder and harder.

'What is wrong with you?' Zane thought to himself. He forced himself to pick up the pace, but it wasn't easy.

Rikki stood in the bathroom, leaning on the sink to hold herself up. She was breathing hard, trying to hold herself together. She wasn't succeeding.

"Come on, Rikki. Come on." She repeated over and over in her head.

Rikki leaned over the sink and closed her eyes. After a few more deep breaths she felt ready to venture back out.

Walking quickly, before she could second guess herself, she marched out of the restroom and headed straight back to Cleo and Bella.

"Let's dance." Without another word, Rikki took Cleo's arm and dragged her out onto the dance floor.

"Ok..." Cleo said, confused, as she followed her. Bella tailed along closely.

Rikki took Bella and Cleo out onto the middle of the dance floor, dodging dancing couples as they went.

"What are we doing?" Bella shouted over the noise of the loud

music.

"We're dancing!" Rikki shouted back.

Bella and Cleo met confused eyes, then shrugged and joined Rikki in dancing to the upbeat music.

Rikki danced fast with her friends, trying desperately hard to forget about bumping into Zane.

"May I cut in?" Came an unfamiliar male voice.

The trio looked up, trying to identify the voice. It came from a good looking guy who was smiling, unmistakably, right at Rikki. He had blonde hair and blue eyes and, Rikki had to admit, as incredibly good looking.

"I don't think she's interested." Cleo said politely.

"No." Rikki spoke up just a little too loudly. "Sorry," She composed herself. "I mean, I would love to dance with you." Rikki flashed a dazzling smile.

Rikki started to walk off with her new friend. Cleo grabbed her arm before she could disappear into the crowd.

"Rikki," She said concernedly. "Are you sure?"

"Positive." Rikki said firmly, before following the stranger out further onto the dance floor.

"I'm Sam." The stranger shouted over the roar of the music.

"Rikki." She shouted back.

Sam nodded, and then pulled Rikki in close to dance to the upbeat song that was playing.

The pair danced to the music, an upbeat song that seemed familiar to most of the crowd. Bella and Cleo kept an eagle eye on Rikki, but Rikki had a smile on her face as she danced with Sam.

Truthfully, Rikki was miserable, but there was no way she was going to let Zane see it. She kept a bright smile on her face, but her eyes gave away the sadness she felt. The lights were dim, so Sam didn't seem to notice.

Rikki and Sam danced to one song after another, and it only took about ten minutes for Zane to notice.

Zane had been looking around for Rikki ever since he'd bumped into her in the hallway, but he hadn't spotted her along the edge of the crowd. Zane was standing along the edge of the dance floor trying to carry on a conversation with Nate at the moment. Zane didn't remember Nate being quite this boring. Nate was talking endlessly about all kinds of things that were going on, but Zane couldn't seem to get interested.

"Yeah..." Zane said absently as he caught sight of Rikki's blonde hair out in the crowd of dancers.

Zane zeroed in on Rikki as Nate continued droning on about motor bikes. She was dancing, but Zane didn't see Cleo or Bella with her. So who was she dancing with?

Zane shifted to the side a few inches to get a better look. She was dancing with a boy? Who was that?

"Zane? Zane!" Nate's voice grew louder and more irritated.

"Sorry, what?" Zane didn't turn to look at Nate, he was still trying to get a look at the boy Rikki was dancing with.

"Do you want to get out of here?" Nate moved to stand in between Zane and the dance floor, blocking his view of Rikki.

"No." Zane craned his neck to look behind Nate. Rikki was dancing with a guy Zane didn't recognize. And she was smiling. Zane didn't know why, but looking at Rikki dancing with that boy made him feel... angry?

No, not angry, Zane realized. Jealous. He was jealous.

Zane's brow furrowed. Why would he be jealous, he didn't care who Rikki danced with. Zane focused his attention onto Nate, but he found his eyes continually straying out onto the dance floor towards Rikki.

Rikki was forcing herself not to look for Zane. She kept her face smiling right at Sam. He had been talking to her while they danced, but she didn't hear any of it. She kept thinking about Zane and the way he'd looked at her that evening.

Rikki found her eyes straying towards the people standing around the dance floor, looking for Zane's familiar silhouette.

'No.' Rikki thought to herself, making her eyes look back at Sam. 'You are not thinking about Zane tonight.'

"Are you alright?" Sam looked at Rikki concernedly.

"Oh, I'm fine." Rikki almost managed to smile.

"You look like you could use a break." Sam stopped dancing and took Rikki's hand, surprising her. He led her towards the concession area. "I'll get you a drink."

Rikki looked at Sam's fingers entwined in hers as she followed behind him. They just didn't look right.

"Wait here, I'll be back in just a second." Sam said with a wink. He left Rikki waiting a few steps from the counter and went to get in line.

Rikki sighed and turned to look back out onto the dance floor. She located Bella and Cleo, who were standing on the other side of the floor with school friends. Rikki met Cleo's eyes.

"Are you ok?" Cleo mouthed at Rikki.

Rikki nodded and gave Cleo a cheesy thumbs up.

"Rikki." A male voice behind her caught Rikki's attention.

Rikki plastered a dazzling smile on her face and turned around, expecting Sam to be back with their drinks.

Zane was standing right behind her.

Rikki's eyes widened as she took in Zane's face. "Zane..." She breathed. Rikki immediately turned to walk away and almost walked right into Sam, who was holding two drinks in his hand.

"Sam!" Rikki said, surprised.

"Here you go," Sam held one of the cold drinks out to Rikki.

"She needs a straw"-

"I need a straw"- Rikki and Zane spoke at the exact same time. They looked at each other in mild surprise.

Sam examined Rikki and Zane carefully, a confused expression on his face. "Ok..." He said as he turned to walk back to the counter.

"Why did you say that?" Rikki asked Zane coolly.

"I don't know." Zane said, bewildered. "It just popped out."

Rikki composed herself quickly. "What are you doing here, Zane?"

"I came out with Nate." Zane answered defensively.

"No, I mean why are you here. Talking to me." Rikki crossed her arms over her chest.

Zane wracked his brain, trying to decide what to say. In reality, he didn't really know why he was there. As soon as he saw Rikki walking off the dance floor with her guy friend he had immediately followed her. He couldn't help it.

Rikki was still waiting for an answer. "Well?"

"Do you know him?" Zane flickered his eyes toward Sam, who was still looking for a straw for Rikki.

"Sam?" Rikki raised her eyebrows. "It's none of your business."

"Hey, I just asked a question." Zane said irritably. "I don't care who you dance with."

"You don't care about anything." Rikki said coldly.

"You don't know what I care about." Zane said quickly, taking one step in closer to Rikki.

Rikki also stepped in closer. "Well, I know what you don't care about."

Zane edged in just a little closer. Their faces were only a few inches apart. "Are you sure about that?" He said quietly.

"Um, Rikki?"

Rikki and Zane snapped their heads towards Sam, who was standing awkwardly beside them. He still held the two drinks, one of which now had a red straw in it.

Sam held the drink out to Rikki but he was looking Zane up and down. "And who are you?" He asked politely.

"No one." Zane said dismissively as he turned his back on the couple and stalked back to where Nate was waiting impatiently.

Rikki watched him walk away before she turned her attention back to Sam, who was still standing there holding the drinks.

"I'm sorry." She said quickly.

Sam stood there with a confused look on his face. "Who was that guy?" He asked as he held out the drink to Rikki.

"Oh... he's..." Rikki stirred her drink as she thought about how to answer. "He's... just a friend."

Sam's brow furrowed. "An old boyfriend?"

"Kind of." Rikki said absently as she looked through the crowd for Bella and Cleo. She spotted them standing near the games.

"Hey, Sam?" Rikki looked up at him. "Thanks so much, I had fun dancing with you. But I need to go."

"Go? Now?" Sam said, surprised.

"Yeah, sorry." Rikki handed him back the drink and took off towards her friends.

Rikki practically ran up to Bella, surprising her.

"Rikki! You scared me." Bella laughed.

"What's going on? Where's that guy you were with?" Cleo looked around but didn't see him.

"Sam? I don't know." Rikki spoke fast. "Can we go home?"

"Sure." Cleo was worried. Rikki had a practically panicked look on her face. "Come on."

Three girls stepped outside, Bella and Cleo practically jogging to keep up with Rikki's quick pace.

"Rikki!" Bella called. "Slow down!"

Rikki stopped walking and turned around. "I'm sorry." She said, looking at her friends.

"Rikki, I need you to talk to us." Cleo put her hands on Rikki's

shoulders. "Do you want to talk about Zane? We're worried about you."

Rikki didn't want to talk about it. In fact she wanted to be alone. "I'm really sorry, guys." She said apologetically. "I shouldn't have dragged you two out tonight. I think I just need some time to get used to all this."

"You don't need to apologize." Bella said encouragingly. "We just want you to know that we're here for you."

"I know." Rikki pulled her face into a vague smile. "Thank you. I'll call you both tomorrow?"

"Why don't I stay with you tonight?" Cleo suggested.

"I'm fine. Really." Rikki tried to sound convincing.

Cleo and Bella didn't quite believe her, but they didn't know what to do other than to do what Rikki wanted.

Slowly, Bella and Cleo walked away. Rikki watched them go. She felt bad for the way she'd treated her friends that night. They were just trying to be there for her, but she didn't feel like confiding in anyone. Seeing Zane had really shaken her up.

It was weird, he kept telling her that he didn't care about her, but the look in his eyes tonight seemed different. Almost like the old Zane, but not quite.

Rikki walked onto the sand, looking out over the water. She just wanted to be far away from everyone so she could think.

Breaking out into a run, Rikki tore out into the waves. She dove in as soon as the water was deep enough and sped off to Mako island.

Zane and Nate were still inside. Nate had given up trying to talk to Zane and had struck up a conversation with a group of girls who were trying hard to ignore him.

Zane stood alone, trying to find Rikki in the crowd. He spotted Sam and walked over to him quickly.

"Where's Rikki?" Zane demanded.

"Oh, you." Sam didn't seem very glad to see Zane again. "I have no idea." He shrugged. "She took off."

Zane turned and walked away without another word. He walked outside and looked around, but didn't see anyone. He pulled out his phone as he started walking towards his house.

Zane dialed Rikki's number and then paused. He felt drawn to her, and he couldn't explain why. He didn't want to get closer to Rikki, but he found himself wanting to hear her voice.

Zane pressed send and held the phone up to his ear nervously. It went straight to voicemail. He couldn't decide if he felt relieved or disappointed that she hadn't answered.

The porch light was on as Zane walked up the path to his front door. Zane's dad looked up from the couch as Zane walked in quietly.

"You don't look so good." Harrison said seriously as he stood and walked over to examine Zane. "Are you feeling alright?"

"Yeah, I'm just tired." Zane said wearily. "I think I'll go to bed."

Zane made his way up the steps and to his bedroom. He fell heavily onto his bed, exhausted. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the little box where it sat on his nightstand. He reached over and took the box in his hand, pulling it open.

The little ring sat, sparkling, on the black velvet. Zane looked at the ring for a long time.

A little fire seemed to have been set in Zane's chest. In a second he went from being exhausted to not being able to sit still. Zane paced in his room, his eyes never looking away from the little ring.

Zane needed to talk to Rikki. He practically ran downstairs and out the front door.

The lights in Rikki's house were dark and no one answered when Zane rang the bell. Without hesitation, he took off towards Cleo's house and knocked on the door.

"Zane?" Cleo said, surprised, as she opened the door. Bella, Lewis, and Will were inside as well.

"Is Rikki here?" Zane asked hurriedly.

"No..." Cleo answered carefully. "Is she ok?"

"I just need to talk to her." Zane explained. "Do you know where she is?"

"She just said she wanted to be alone." Bella answered.

"Do you want to come in for a bit?" Cleo opened the door wider.

"No. Thanks." Zane turned around and headed towards the water. He knew exactly where Rikki was.

15. Relapse

Rikki had been in the moon pool by herself for almost an hour when she heard the footsteps echoing down the entrance to the cavern. She quickly pushed herself away from the edge of the pool and disappeared under the water, swimming towards the underwater entrance. Surfacing just enough to see over the edge of the water, she stayed hidden by the entrance to the cave as she watched to see who was coming.

Rikki found herself paralyzed with shock as Zane burst into the cavern, out of breath and looking around excitedly.

"Rikki!" Zane shouted, looking around as he walked through the cave.

He quickly realized that Rikki wasn't standing anywhere inside and crouched down at the water's edge.

"Rikki?" Zane squinted as he tried to see into the water. He couldn't see anything other than the deep blue of the sea.

Zane sat back on his heels and spoke out into the air. "I know you're in here somewhere." At least, Zane was pretty sure she was in there somewhere. Zane sighed, taking in the cave. He leaned back, looking up to the vast sky above him. Zane felt a weird kind of peace come to him. He breathed easily, content just to sit there for a minute.

A million thoughts flew through Rikki's head as she watched Zane sitting there. What was he doing there? Why was he calling for her? He didn't look upset. Should she show herself? What if seeing her as a mermaid freaked him out again? What should she do? Rikki stayed still as she tried to decide what to do.

Zane let himself fall backwards to lay flat on his back as he looked up at the sky. He didn't know where Rikki was, but just being there soothed him.

Rikki made her decision. She couldn't just swim away without knowing why Zane was there. Rikki closed her eyes and took a long deep breath before she powered herself forward silently with her tail.

"Zane?" She said quietly from the edge of the pool across from him. She didn't want to get too close just yet.

Zane sat up in a flash, breathing hard.

"I didn't mean to scare you!" Rikki said anxiously. She backed away even further. "I'll go." Rikki turned to swim away.

"No, no, Rikki wait." Zane stopped her as he recovered. "You just scared me. I thought I was all alone in here, that's all. Please, don't go."

Hesitantly, Rikki swam back into the cave, but kept her distance from Zane. Zane couldn't look away from her, but he wasn't necessarily looking at her lovingly. He was just... looking at her. He stood and backed up slightly, examining Rikki up and down.

The only sound in the cave was the splashing of the sea water as Zane looked at Rikki. Rikki looked at him back, until the silence got to her.

"What is it?" Rikki asked self consciously.

"Sorry for staring." Zane said quietly. He sat back down on the sand, though he didn't move any closer to the water.

Rikki was frustrated. "Why are you here?" She asked impatiently.

Zane opened his mouth but nothing came out. "I don't know." He said finally.

Rikki raised her eyebrows. "You don't know? Zane, you came running in here as if something important was happening. I mean, I almost

thought..." Rikki trailed off, unable to finish her sentence.

In reality, for just a second Rikki had hoped that Zane was running to find her to tell her that he remembered. But looking at him now, she could tell he was still vacant. Rikki chastened herself. She was silly to have thought that Zane would remember everything just like that.

"So... you're just here because..." Rikki led, "No reason?"

Zane sat cross legged on the sand and dropped his hands to the ground in frustration. "I just had to see you."

"Had to see me?" Rikki looked up at Zane, waiting for him to go on. "Why?"

"I don't know." Zane said slowly. "It's hard to explain, really." Zane edged slightly closer to the edge of the water. "I was laying in my bed, and all of a sudden I just had to see you."

Rikki couldn't think of anything to say, so she just kept her mouth shut and let Zane continue talking.

Zane leaned forward, holding his head in his hands as he spoke. "It's like, my body is drawn to you. I'm... anxious when I'm not around you. Being near you seems to calm me down." Zane dropped his head down as he continued. "But, Rikki, I'm still so totally weirded out by all of this. I mean, I don't want to date you."

Zane looked up. He hadn't meant to say that out loud. Rikki just looked at him. She wasn't going to let him get to her again.

"I think I'll just head out." She said glumly.

"No!" Zane shouted, more loudly than he'd meant to. "Rikki, I don't know what it is, but I don't want to be away from you."

"Zane, I'm not going to stay here just to make you relax." Rikki spoke with a confidence that she didn't really know she had. "That's not fair to me. Do you have feelings for me?"

"No." Zane shook his head. "But, yes." Zane looked honestly distraught "Rikki, I don't know how to explain it. Really, I wish I could. I just need to be near you. It feels so good to talk to you, but I really don't know why."

Rikki nodded. So Zane wanted to be close to her, but he didn't actually have any feelings for her. Awesome.

"Listen, Zane," She spoke wearily. "I'm thrilled that being near me makes you feel better, really I am. But it definitely doesn't make me feel any better. In fact, it makes me feel like crap. So I'm going to head out."

"No, Rikki please don't leave." Zane said desperately. "Being near you is making me feel calmer than I've felt for days now."

"I'm sure you'll get over it." Rikki said before she dove into the water and swam away. Her tail splashed water onto the stone of the cave as she made her exit.

Zane watched her go. As soon as she swam away he felt an overwhelming urge to follow her. He broke out into a cold sweat and his pulse raced as he looked after Rikki.

'Stop it.' Zane told himself. 'Cut it out.' Zane took several deep breaths, but it didn't seem to help. He kept looking through the water for Rikki.

"Rikki" Zane shouted towards the water, but she didn't resurface.

Instantly, goosebumps appeared on Zane's skin. He needed to be close to Rikki. The cave seemed colder and darker than it had just a few minutes ago. The feeling of comfort he'd had there was gone.

Zane stood and brushed himself off. He took one more look around the cave, letting his eyes linger on the water before he turned to walk out. He paused as he heard a slight splash of the water. He spun around quickly, hoping that Rikki had returned.

Cleo surfaced, looking around the pool anxiously. Her eyes narrowed as she saw Zane standing there.

"Zane?" Se asked curiously. "What are you doing here? Is Rikki here?"

Zane took one step into the cave. "She was. She left not too long ago."

"We've been looking for her." Cleo said tiredly. "We got worried about her after you couldn't find her. She isn't answering her phone."

"I doubt she has it with her in the water." Zane said bitterly.

Cleo put her hands on the side of the pool and worked to pull herself out. "Give me a hand?" She extended an arm to Zane and looked up at him expectantly.

"Um..." Zane tried to make his feet walk towards Cleo but he couldn't look away from her fin. It was so...scaly.

"Oh, right." Realization hit Cleo's face. "That's right. I forgot, you're scared of us now." Cleo let herself fall back into the water. "I'll just wait for Lewis. He'll be here any second."

"Hey, I'm not scared of you." Zane said defensively.

"Really?" Cleo floated on her back calmly. "It sure seems that way."

"Well I'm not." Zane folded her arms in front of him.

"Then what are you?" Cleo looked up at the sky as she floated.

"What do you mean?" Zane asked, confused.

Cleo propped herself up on her elbows on the edge of the pool. "What are you? You chase Rikki, you push her away, you tell her you want to

be with her, you change your mind. Zane, you're torturing her."

"She seemed pretty alright tonight. She danced for practically an hour with that blonde guy." Zane paced as he spoke.

"Zane," Cleo looked at him seriously. "Do you really believe that she's alright?"

Zane didn't have an answer for her.

Luckily for Zane, Lewis came jogging into the cave a second later. Lewis looked at Zane inquisitively when he saw him standing there.

"What are you doing here?" Lewis asked.

"Get in line," Cleo called. "He still hasn't answered me yet."

"I don't need to answer anybody." Zane dropped his arms and stalked to the cave entrance. He turned back to the cave, looking around one more time. "I'm done." Zane didn't want for either of them to answer him before walking purposefully out of the cavern. He shook his head, trying to clear it, but everything seemed cloudy.

"What was that?" Lewis asked Cleo as he helped her out of the pool.

"I don't know, but I'm definitely worried about Rikki." Cleo said seriously. "And I'm also worried about Zane."

Zane steered the boat towards the dock outside his house. His mind was racing too fast for him to keep up. He kept having flashes of what he had to assume were memories. They raced through his head quickly, like a whirlwind of pictures. He couldn't seem to grasp onto any one thought for long enough to figure out what it was.

Zane parked the boat and tied it off. He felt like he was moving in slow motion. He stood outside his house for a long time but didn't walk inside. Eventually he made his way to the front step and sat down, burying his face in his hands. His head hurt, badly. It felt like red hot pokers were jabbing into his brain.

Zane breathed heavily as he broke out into a cold sweat. It hurt to open his eyes. The street lights around him seemed to be brighter than usual and it felt so hot outside he could barely take in a breath.

Holding onto the banister firmly, Zane managed to pull himself to stand. He cracked his eyes open and tried to walk up the stairs. He was so dizzy he could hardly put one foot in front of the other. Something was wrong.

Rikki was walking towards Cleo's house when her phone went off. She read Zane's name on the caller ID and ignored the call. She didn't feel like trying to deal with Zane anymore that night. Rikki rang the bell and waited for Cleo to answer.

"Thank goodness." Cleo said, relieved. "We were worried about you."

"Oh, I'm fine." Rikki spoke casually. "What have you guys been up to?"

Rikki's phone went off again. "Zane." Rikki muttered, pushing the ignore button on her phone.

"What does he want?" Lewis asked as he walked up.

"I don't know." Rikki said absently as she put her phone in her pocket. "But I don't feel like talking to him."

"Fair enough." Cleo nodded. "Now get in here."

Rikki grinned, glad to be spending time with her friends. They put in a silly movie and eventually managed to put some of the stress from the last week behind them.

"Thank you." Rikki leaned in to talk to Cleo. "I needed this."

Cleo smiled, glad that Rikki finally seemed to be relaxing. Her smile faded as Rikki's phone rang again.

Rikki groaned as she fished her phone out of her pocket. Her look of annoyance changed to one of confusion as she read the ID.

"Harrison?" Rikki said as she looked at the phone. She flipped it open and held it to her ear. "Yes?"

Is he ok?" Rikki whispered. She cleared her throat. "I'll be there as soon as I can." Rikki fumbled to flip the phone shut as she bolted for the door.

"Rikki, wait!" Cleo and Lewis chased after her. "What's wrong?"

"Zane's back in the hospital." Rikki spoke breathlessly. She looked up at Cleo with tears in her eyes. "Harrison found him passed out on their porch. Cleo, Zane tried to call me and I..." Rikki drifted off.

"Don't worry. Let's get to the hospital." Lewis said firmly.

The three of them dashed out of the house and out into the night.

16. Too little too late

Rikki, Cleo, Will, Lewis, and Bella burst into the hospital at a run. Rikki dashed to the front desk, stammering out Zane's name. The receptionist pointed toward a hall with a blue door at the end of it and gave the group instructions on how to get to Zane's room.

Tears were running down Rikki's cheeks as she reached Zane's door. She pushed it open and ran inside, followed closely by her friends.

Harrison was standing beside Zane's bed. He looked up gravely as Rikki entered. "Thanks for coming." He said quietly. "He keeps asking

for you."

"He's awake?" Rikki said breathlessly as she ran to the side of the bed.

"No." Harrison answered. "I found him on the porch, unconscious. He hasn't woken up yet. But he's been talking in his sleep." Harrison looked at Rikki seriously. "Mostly about you."

Rikki froze as she looked at the expression on Harrison's face. Harrison had known that Rikki had been a mermaid a few years ago, but she and her friends had succeeded in making him believe that they were normal girls. It appeared that he wasn't quite fooled anymore.

"Oh." She said weakly. "So I guess he's been talking about-"

"Yeah." Harrison cut her off. His eyes were unreadable. "He's been talking about that."

Rikki crossed her arms over her chest worriedly. "Whats wrong with him?" She asked. "He was fine."

Harrison shook his head. "The doctors aren't sure. They think he must have relapsed but they can't seem to tell me why."

As if on cue, a young doctor entered the room. "Harrison." He beckoned for him to join him.

Harrison put an arm around Rikki's shoulders and walked her with him as he joined the doctor. "Have you found the problem?"

"It appears," The doctor hung several x-rays from a metal railing, "That your boy had some residual swelling in his brain that didn't show up in the first set of x-rays we took. Either that or he's hit his head again, causing new swelling."

The doctor turned to look at Rikki. "Has he? Has he fallen or sustained any kind of injury?"

Rikki shook her head no. "Not that I know of." She said.

"We're going to keep an eye on him." The doctor said. "I expect him to regain consciousness within the next few hours. We'll be able to run some more definitive tests then."

Harrison nodded as the young doctor walked out of the room. He and Rikki joined the rest of the group standing around Zane's bed.

"I guess now we wait." Cleo said.

"Rikki, may I have a word?" Harrison spoke in hushed tones.

Rikki nodded and followed Harrison to the other side of the room, away from the others.

"Rikki," Harrison began hesitantly, unsure of exactly how to say what he wanted to say to her. "I need to talk to you about my son."

Rikki nodded. "Yes?"

"Judging by what he's been murmuring about, in his sleep, I can only assume that you're still a... a you know." Harrison paused awkwardly as he waited for Rikki to finish his sentence.

Rikki let several seconds of tense silence pass as she gauged the situation. Eventually she nodded, her eyes nervous. "I'm still a mermaid." She whispered.

Harrison nodded slowly as he processed the words. "He loves you." He said thoughtfully.

Rikki looked at Harrison, surprised to hear his words. "How do you know?" She asked.

"I've seen the way he looks at you." Harrison looked down at Rikki with gentle eyes. "And I've heard the way he was speaking in his sleep just now." He paused for just a second. "I just have to ask, are you being careful of him? Of his injuries?"

"I'm trying." Rikki said fervently. "I wasn't trying to overwhelm him, I didn't even tell him about any of the mermaid stuff, he found out on his own, and he wouldn't let it go."

"That's my son." Harrison said with a small smile. "When he wants something he doesn't give up easily."

"Don't I know it." Rikki agreed.

"Just be careful." Harrison said seriously. "He's fragile right now, his mind is still letting him down. He doesn't need any extra stress."

"I agree." Rikki nodded. "I just want to make sure he's alright and then I'll go. I won't call him, I won't visit. I'll just leave him to it."

This time it was Harrison who was surprised. "It doesn't need to be quite so drastic." He said, crossing his arms over his chest. "You can still visit, I'm sure he'd like to see you. I just wanted you to be careful of his feelings."

"It's not just for him." Rikki looked dead into Harrison's eyes. "I love your son, but this is hard on me as well."

Harrison nodded. "I see."

He reached out and pulled Rikki to him for a gruff hug. Rikki was too shocked to move, but relaxed into the hug after a few seconds.

"Thank you Rikki." Harrison said under his breath.

Rikki didn't know exactly what he was thanking her for, but it felt good to be held by a father-like type, so she just went with it.

The pair broke the embrace awkwardly and made their way back to the group, who had observed the exchange with curiosity.

"Everything alright?" Cleo asked Rikki quietly.

"Just fine." Rikki whispered back.

"Thank you for all being here." Harrison addressed the group. "I need to fill out some more paperwork, I'll be just down the hall if he wakes."

Harrison exited the room, letting the door swing shut behind him. The minute the door closed the group turned it's attention to Rikki.

"What did he want?" Bella pushed.

"He just wanted to look out for Zane." Rikki said dismissively. "Don't worry about it."

Bella and Cleo exchanged a look but didn't push it.

"So what now?" Will asked. "Do we wait?"

"I'm not going anywhere." Lewis said, pulling a chair up to the bedside.

"Which means that I'm not going anywhere either." Cleo sat beside him.

Bella looked to Rikki. "Are you staying?"

"Yeah." Rikki said. "Until he wakes. I want to make sure he's alright before I go."

"Ok then." Will and Bella made themselves comfortable on the loveseat along the side of the room.

Rikki sat in a chair beside the loveseat. She didn't pull it to the side of the bed, like Lewis had, she just sat quietly and waited. She found herself relieved that Harrison had spoken to her. It made her feel less guilty about leaving Zane.

Time passed slowly. The doctor came in a couple times to check Zane's vital signs, and each time he told the group that everything seemed normal and that it was just a matter of waiting for Zane to decide to wake up.

The clock in the hallway chimed twice, waking Lewis from the doze he'd slid into. He looked around the room, checking on everyone. Bella and Will were sound asleep on the couch. To Lewis's left was Cleo, who was sleeping soundly.

"Two AM." Lewis muttered, checking his watch. He twisted his head around, looking for Rikki. She still sat in her chair, her eyes just as open as they had been hours ago. She was focused on a spot on the floor, not blinking.

"Rikki?" Lewis called quietly.

Rikki looked up, focusing her eyes on Lewis.

"Are you alright?" Lewis asked concernedly.

"I really wish people would stop asking me that." Rikki said bitterly.

Lewis nodded, turning his attention back to Zane. He was worried about his friend. Well, both of his friends.

The next hour passed even more slowly than the last. By the time the clock struck three Lewis was sleeping just as soundly as Cleo, Bella, and Will.

Rikki was still wide awake. She was lost in her thoughts, thinking about everything that had happened. She was too distracted to even notice when Zane opened his eyes.

Zane blinked several times, trying to focus on the ceiling. He put together the fact that he was in the hospital. Zane looked to his right. He was surprised to see Lewis and Cleo, sound asleep, sitting in chairs beside his bed. Zane squinted, trying to look around the rest of the big room. He saw Bella and Will, curled up together on the couch, and then he zeroed in on Rikki.

"Hey." Zane spoke, his voice barely a whisper.

Rikki's head turned sharply. "You're awake?" Zane could hear the relief in her voice.

"We should tell the doctor." Rikki stood and started for the door.

"No, wait." Zane spoke weakly.

Rikki paused at the door. She turned back to Zane hesitantly. "Why?"

"I've been dreaming about you." Zane said, his expression unreadable.

Normally Rikki would have been flattered, but she was so weary of all of the back-and-forth she just sighed. "That's great." She muttered sarcastically.

Zane's eyes narrowed. "What is it?"

"Nothing." Rikki said tiredly. "I'm going to get the doctor." She pushed the door open and disappeared down the hallway.

Zane felt confused as he looked up at the ceiling. He had expected Rikki to want to talk about what he'd dreamed about, or at least to want to be close to him. Instead, she'd seemed distant.

The doctor burst into the room, followed closely by Harrison. He rushed over to Zane and immediately began taking his blood pressure.

"Where's Rikki?" Zane asked.

"Ah, she's gone home." Harrison answered regretfully. "I'm sorry Zane."

The rest of the group had awoken by that time. They gathered around

the bed, offering Zane smiles and well-wishes.

Zane smiled back at all of them, thanking them for being there, but he realized that he was hurt that Rikki had left so quickly.

"Hey, Lewis." Zane beckoned for him to come closer. "Will Rikki be back?"

Lewis didn't quite know how to answer him. "I don't think so, man." He said gently.

Zane sank back down onto his pillows. Rikki was gone, and this time he could just feel that she wasn't coming back. Zane closed his eyes and breathed deeply. His head was still swimming with image after image.

The doctor came bustling back into the room at that moment, armed with a syringe full of clear liquid. "I know you just woke up, but I really want your mind to rest. This will help you sleep." He explained.

Zane didn't protest. At the moment, he would like nothing more than to fall asleep and forget about everything that was going on. Within a few seconds he was out like a light.

Lewis and the others cleared out of the room. They would be back tomorrow to check on Zane, but they couldn't accomplish much else by staying at the hospital all night.

The doctor made a few more notes on his chart before checking Zane's vitals one last time. Satisfied with what he observed, he clicked off the bedside light and headed out the door.

"Oh, excuse me." He said as he bumped into someone entering the room.

Rikki stepped quietly inside the door and stood along the wall. She watched Zane sleep for a long time before walking slowly to stand at his bedside. She leaned over and brushed his hair off of his face and sat down in the chair Lewis had pulled over.

"Zane." she spoke quietly. He didn't move a muscle as she spoke. "I wanted to talk to you, even if you can't hear me." She continued, looking down at the sleeping Zane. "I just wanted to, well, to thank you I guess. Thank you for being there for me. Before the accident, anyway. I'll never forget how wonderful you were to me. I hope that you're happy, truly." Rikki sighed. "Your life will be easier without me in it. Who knows," Rikki laughed bitterly. "Maybe someday we'll be friends again." Rikki looked at Zane, her eyes filled with intensity. "I love you." She said softly. Slowly, she leaned over and kissed Zane gently on the lips. She stood up slowly, memorizing Zane's face as he lay there. "Goodbye, Zane." She whispered as she turned to the door.

The door shut behind her with a click.

Zane's eyes opened the second the door closed.

Rikki ran down the path, not sure where she was headed. All she knew was that she needed to get out of there, and she needed to get away now. She wanted to put as much distance between herself and Zane as she could. Maybe if she got far enough away she would be able to stop herself from thinking about everything.

Rikki stopped running long enough to take in her surroundings. She was on the far end of town, close to the beach. She began running towards the waves, ready to jump in and swim away. She paused right at the edge of the water.

Slowly, she turned around. She made her feet walk back towards the city. She made her way back to her home, though it took a while.

Rikki walked upstairs slowly. She was exhausted. She climbed into bed and curled up on her side, looking at the framed photo of Zane and her that lived on her nightstand. She reached out slowly and turned the picture around. She didn't want to think about Zane anymore.

Rikki lay in bed for a long time, staring blankly up at the ceiling. The night passed by slowly.

Zane was also laying in bed looking up at the ceiling. He hadn't moved in several seconds. He was trying to filter out his thoughts, which were racing through his head at lightning speed.

He had heard a voice speaking to him through a hazy fog. It had seemed so familiar, yet Zane couldn't quite seem to place it. It comforted him, soothed him. He couldn't tell what the voice was saying, but the rhythm and cadence of the words made him relax.

Slowly, the fog began to clear. Zane was still lost in a sea of black, but the voice became more clear as he focused on it. He could hear the heartbreak in the voice that spoke in his head. It sounded so haunting, so desperate. He found himself feeling sorry for the voice that spoke in his head. He wanted to comfort the girl, to tell her that everything would be alright.

Zane focused all of his energy on the sound of the voice. He began to be able to decipher words from sounds. He listened as hard as he could, able to hear the last two words the voice spoke.

'Goodbye Zane.' He heard.

And then the voice had disappeared. He could feel it moving further away from him. Zane's eyes flew open as he regained consciousness.

Zane blinked several times, focusing on the ceiling above him. He raised a hand to his forehead, rubbing at his temple.

A young nurse rushed into the room. "Mr. Bennett, you're awake?" She asked, surprised.

Zane didn't bother answering her.

"You should have slept all the way through most of tomorrow with all of the drugs they gave you." The nurse spoke under her breath as she examined Zane's chart. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I've been better." Zane muttered.

"Give me a second." The nurse pulled a syringe from the cabinet in the corner of the room. "We'll have you asleep again in no time."

"No." Zane said, more loudly than he'd meant to.

The nurse stepped back in surprise.

"I'm sorry." Zane softened his voice. "I didn't mean to shout. Please, I'm not tired. How about you just let me be awake for a bit?"

The nurse checked Zane's chart again. "I don't know, Mr. Bennett." She said thoughtfully. "Your doctor ordered you several doses of sleep medication. Still," The nurse looked at the expression on Zane's face. He was practically pleading with her to stay awake. "I suppose I can let you be for the rest of the night. But if you get tired I expect you to go straight to sleep. Don't fight to stay awake, do you hear me?"

Zane nodded. "Thank you." He meant what he said.

Zane felt like if he fell asleep right then he would forget about the voice he had heard in his head, and he didn't want that to happen. He settled down into his pillows, thinking about the last words he had heard.

"Goodbye Zane." He spoke aloud quietly. Who would be saying goodbye to him?

Zane tried to remember the last several days, but it was if his memories were filled with holes. He could remember talking to Lewis, but he couldn't remember what he had done after that. He remembered being on a date with Rikki, and he remembered being terrified of Rikki, but he couldn't remember why.

Zane looked around for his phone but he couldn't see it. A hospital phone sat on the stand beside his bed. Zane reached over to pick up the handset. He knew who he wanted to talk to. He dialed quickly, anxious to speak to a friend.

"Hello?" Lewis spoke sleepily.

"Lewis." Zane said animatedly. "I need to know what's been going on lately. I'm totally confused, can you fill me in?"

"What are you talking about?" Lewis tried to clear the sleep from his head.

"I'm in the hospital, did you know that?" Zane kept talking.

"What? Yeah, of course I do." Lewis murmured. "I talked to you just a few hours ago in your room."

"You did?" Zane asked, bewildered. He didn't remember speaking to Lewis. "Then why am I in here?"

"Ah..." Lewis switched on his bedside lamp as he sat up reluctantly. "They don't really know, they said you relapsed or something."

"Relapsed?" Zane frowned. "Relapsed into what?"

Lewis's mind finally kicked into gear. "Zane..." He said slowly.

"Yeah?" Zane answered.

"What is the last thing you remember?" Lewis questioned.

"The last thing I remember?" Zane repeated. "You know, that's a funny question. My memories are all shuffled up, I don't know what's real and what I've been dreaming about." Suddenly Zane felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Why?" He asked worriedly. "Lewis, have I been in an accident?"

Lewis was already out of bed and pulling on a pair of jeans. "I'll be there in just a few minutes." He promised. "Don't go anywhere."

"No chance of that." Zane looked at the IV in his arm. "Hurry, Lewis."

Lewis was trying not to get too excited as he dressed. Zane's voice over the phone had sounded different. It had sounded as if he were speaking to the real Zane, not the Zane that had been around for the last several days. Lewis didn't call Rikki or Cleo, he didn't want to get their hopes up just yet.

Quietly, being sure not to wake up his parents, Lewis crept down the steps and out the front door, making his way towards the hospital as quickly as he could.

Zane lay in his hospital bed, waiting impatiently for Lewis to arrive. He desperately needed to talk to his best friend. He didn't know why he was there, or how he had gotten there. Zane tried to remember what had happened to land him in the hospital, but everything was a complete blank.

"Think, Zane." He admonished himself, but try as hard as he could, his last memory was of agreeing to meet Nate to ride their motorbikes that day. He remembered not really wanting to go, but he had felt like he owed Nate some time together. After that, everything was spotty. He couldn't put together a single full memory. He could remember flashes here and there, but not enough to string together what had happened.

"Did I crash my bike?" Zane could remember a flash or two from the bike track, but not much. "Or did I lose consciousness underwater?" He also remembered being frightened at the moon pool. Maybe he had been in the water too long?"

Zane shrugged, exasperated. He had no idea what had gone on. He would just have to wait for Lewis to get there to tell him what had happened.

Luckily, Zane didn't have to wait much longer before Lewis came running into the hospital room.

"Thank god, I thought you'd never get here." Zane said relievedly.

"It's almost 4 in the morning, Zane." Lewis said, rolling his eyes slightly. "I got here as quickly as I could." Lewis sat in the chair next to Zane's bed.

"Ok." Zane nodded, glad to have company that he felt comfortable with. "So tell me, Lewis. How in the world did I get here?"

Lewis rubbed his hands together thoughtfully as he leaned forward. "Zane," He began carefully, "Do you know how you got here?"

"No, Lewis." Zane said impatiently. "Obviously I don't know how I got here. I'm waiting for you to tell me." Zane looked at Lewis expectantly.

"Alright..." Lewis didn't know exactly where to begin. He didn't know what Zane remembered and what he didn't.

"Do you remember... the accident?" He asked gently.

"Accident?" Zane's eyes narrowed. "What kind of accident?"

"I guess you don't." Lewis said matter-of-factly. "Zane, listen. You were in an accident when you were off biking with Nate. You had some... well, quite a bit of memory loss."

"What?" Zane laughed. "You're telling me I have amnesia?"

"Yeah, I am." Lewis said seriously. "There's a lot about the last five or so years that you don't remember."

"That's impossible." Zane shook his head. "I don't remember how I got to be here, but I remember everything else."

"Are you sure about that?" Lewis raised his eyebrows. "What did you do yesterday?"

"Yesterday I..." Zane's voice faded out as he tried to remember yesterday. "Yesterday, I made plans to hang out with Nate at the bike track."

"Exactly." Lewis sounded satisfied. "Zane, you made those plans two weeks ago."

"No way." Zane said.

Lewis looked hard at Zane. "What is today's date?" He asked seriously.

Zane thought hard, putting things together in his head. "It's the 12th." He said weakly.

"Zane," Lewis leaned forward slightly. "It's the 27th."

"Wha-... No..." Zane shook his head. "No it isn't."

Lewis held out his phone. There, brightly lit on the display, was the current time and date. Zane examined it carefully before handing the phone back to Lewis wordlessly.

"It can't be the 27th." Zane said firmly. "What have I been doing for the last two weeks? Have I been in here the whole time?"

"No, you haven't." Lewis said, slowly. He didn't know what Zane remembered or what he didn't. "Zane," Lewis began, "How do you feel about Rikki?"

"Rikki..." Zane said the name out loud. It took him several seconds to put his thoughts together. "She goes to our school, right?"

Lewis felt a rush of excitement. Yes, the memory Zane had of Rikki was distant and vague, but it was a memory. Before tonight he had had no recollection of her at all.

"And..." Zane continued distantly. "We date? Is she my girlfriend?" Zane looked at Lewis, confused.

"You're right!" Lewis couldn't hide the enthusiasm from his voice. "Rikki is your girlfriend!" Lewis leaned in even closer to Zane's ear. "Do you remember anything... else? About Rikki?" Lewis watched Zane nervously.

"She likes swimming." Zane murmured softly. He suddenly felt himself overcome with a wave of exhaustion. "Hey, Lewis, I think I need to get some rest. Will you visit tomorrow?"

It took every bit of self control Lewis had not to push Zane to stay awake. He wanted to tell Zane the things that had been going on. He wanted to know how much he remembered about Rikki. He wanted to know, once and for all, if they had the real Zane back.

Lewis looked down at his friend, who was already fading away into a sleepy silence.

"Zane?" Lewis spoke.

Zane didn't stir. He was breathing deeply, clearly sound asleep.

Lewis settled into the chair, making himself comfortable. He had every intention of being beside Zane's bed the second Zane woke up the next morning.

Lewis was desperately, hoping that this mess was all over. He wanted things to go back to normal. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply. Tomorrow would be here soon enough.

18. He's back

The next day came sooner than Lewis had expected it too. He jerked awake, immediately regretting the quick movement. He tilted his head from side to side, trying to work out the kink in his muscles. He was slumped uncomfortably in the cushion-less hospital chair. He

stretched his arms as his eyes quickly found Zane's hospital bed.

Zane was still laying motionless, sound asleep.

Lewis unfolded himself to stand, grimacing as his muscles protested. He quickly exited the room and headed towards the cafeteria. He reentered just a few minutes later, balancing four cups of coffee precariously on a tray. He set the tray on the table beside Zane's bed.

Lewis took one cup of joe for himself and sat back down in the uncomfortable plastic chair. A few minutes passed before Zane's eyes opened.

Zane blinked a few times, getting an idea for where he was. He remembered last night, Lewis coming to the hospital. He vaguely remembered their conversation. Zane looked over to the door of the room, his eyes landing on Lewis.

"You're still here?" Zane sounded surprised.

"Yup." Lewis said calmly. He nodded towards the coffee. "Are you allowed to have any of that?"

"I better be." Zane pulled himself up to a sitting position as he reached for a Styrofoam cup. He took a long sip of coffee and sank back down into the bed with a sigh. "Thanks."

"Mhm." Lewis nodded, trying to say calm. He wanted to grill Zane on what he remembered, but he didn't want to overwhelm him.

"So..." Zane furrowed his brow. "I was in an accident, right?"

Lewis nodded.

Zane's frown deepened. "Where's Rikki? Has she been by?"

Lewis couldn't help himself. He stood and rushed to the side of Zane's bed nervously. "You remember Rikki?"

"Of course I do." Zane looked at Lewis as if he was an idiot.

"You didn't remember much about her last night?" Lewis pressed.

"I guess things are a bit fuzzy." Zane said slowly, deep in thought.

"But you do remember Rikki?" Lewis asked anxiously. "What do you remember about her?"

"I, uh..." Zane was thinking hard. His head felt cloudy. He shook himself mentally, trying to snap his brain back into play. "Rikki." He said thoughtfully.

"Yes?" Lewis leaned forward.

Zane's eyes flicked to Lewis's, examining him carefully.

"I love Rikki." Zane said calmly, as if he were trying to convince

Lewis. He didn't know why Lewis was looking at him so funny.

"Tell me about Rikki." Lewis's face was intense as he waited for Zane's response.

Zane stared off into the distance. "She's wonderful." He smiled for what felt like the first time in a long time.

"Yeah, she's a peach." Lewis pushed. "What else?"

Zane was still gazing blankly at the back wall. "I love her." He said. "And I want to be with her forever." Zane turned his head to look at Lewis. "But you knew that already." He said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, yeah I did." Lewis was still flustered. "But what else. About Rikki, I mean, do you know? Anything about...water?" Lewis gave up all hopes of subtlety.

"Lewis," Zane said, a confused expression on his face. "Seriously? Did you forget?"

"No!" Lewis practically shouted, but he managed to pull himself back into control. "What do you know about Rikki and water?"

"Well I know that she can't touch it without growing a tail." Zane said sarcastically. "Come on, Lewis. Which of us has the head injury here?"

"You know." Lewis couldn't keep the excitement from his voice.

"Know what?" Zane couldn't have felt any more confused than he did at that moment.

"That Rikki is a..." Lewis lowered his voice to barely a whisper.

"Mermaid?" Zane said coolly. "Of course I do? And, Lewis, we're the only two in here, you don't need to whisper." Zane pulled his head back slightly, examining Lewis. "What is wrong with you?"

A bright smile spread slowly across Lewis's face. His hands shook as he tried to control his excitement. "You remember." Lewis said shakily.

"Remember what?" Zane was lost. His head throbbed slightly as he tried to figure out what Lewis was so excited about.

"You remember!" Lewis laughed crazily as he pulled out his cell phone. He then dashed out the door to find better cell phone signal.

"What in the world." Zane muttered under his breath as he watched Lewis run down the hall.

Zane settled down onto the pillows, deep in thought. Lewis had said that He had had some memory loss, but he remembered everything. Well, he thought he did. Zane furrowed his brow. He supposed that he wouldn't know if he had forgotten things, right? Zane shook his head to clear it as a nurse walked into the room carrying a tray of

food.

"Fantastic, I'm starving." Zane said eagerly. "Thanks."

The nurse all but froze in her tracks. "You're in a much better mood this morning." She observed.

Zane dug in, eating quickly. He was eager to get out of there.

Rikki was still laying on her back in bed when her phone rang. She looked at it for a long time before deciding to reach for it.

"Rikki!" Lewis's voice shouted.

Rikki held the phone away from her ear until Lewis's voice reached a normal volume. "Lewis, slow down. What is it?"

Lewis took a breath before starting over. "Rikki, he's back. Zane is back."

Rikki's heart beat faster as her breath caught in her chest. "He remembers?" She whispered.

"You need to get down here. Now." Lewis said eagerly.

Rikki looked at the phone in her hand, frozen. So many conflicting emotions were flying through her head. She was relieved, excited, and, she realized, a bit hesitant. She knew she should be running at full speed towards the hospital to see Zane, but part of her was holding back.

She was nervous. What if things had changed between them?

Rikki snapped herself out of it, jumping out of bed and hastily pulling on some clothes before running out the door.

Lewis made a quick phone call to Cleo, who promised to call Bella and Will on her way to the hospital.

Zane looked up as Lewis burst back into the room. "Where did you go?"

"To call the guys." Lewis said brightly. "They're on their way."

"Lewis," Zane said. "I seriously need you to calm down and tell me what's been going on."

"Ok." Lewis pulled his chair closer to the hospital bed before plopping into it, cross legged.

Lewis explained to Zane, in as many details as he could, about the events of the last few weeks. He didn't know everything, but he knew most of it. He told Zane about the memory loss, about how he didn't remember Rikki, or what Rikki was.

Zane listened closely as Lewis told him about how he'd reacted to learning about Rikki's secret. He couldn't believe it had happened the way Lewis explained it.

"And you don't remember any of this?" Lewis asked. "From the last few days?"

"No." Zane shook his head, but even as he spoke he could feel tiny bits of memory start to take shape in his head. He closed his eyes, frowning as he tried to hold onto them.

"Zane?" Lewis said worriedly.

"I'm remembering something." Zane explained slowly. "Did... Rikki break up with me?" He looked up at Lewis questioningly.

Lewis's smile flickered briefly. "You just need to talk to her." He said calmly. The truth was that Rikki had broken up with Zane, but Lewis was sure that once they saw each other again and everything settled down they would be fine.

"Zane?" A quiet voice came from the doorway.

Both Zane and Lewis's heads turned to see who it was.

Rikki took a couple steps into the room and stopped. Zane's heart skipped a beat as he looked at her. She had never looked more beautiful to him than she did at that moment.

"I'll just...yeah..." Lewis stood and walked out of the room. He gave Rikki a pat on the back as he passed her.

Zane waited for the door to close behind Lewis before he spoke.

"Aren't you a sight for sore eyes?" He said warmly. "Now get over here." Zane's face broke out into a huge smile as he held his arms out to her.

Rikki couldn't help but to run to Zane's bedside. Zane wrapped his arms around her tightly.

"I feel like I haven't seen you in forever." Zane whispered into Rikki's neck.

"You have no idea." Rikki answered meekly.

Zane pulled back just enough to look Rikki in the eyes. "What's wrong?" He asked, concerned. Rikki had an odd expression on her face. Suddenly, Zane remembered what he'd been thinking about before Rikki had walked in. Rikki had broken up with him.

"Zane, I-" Rikki began.

"No, stop." Zane put a finger over Rikki's lips, silencing her. "Ok," He regrouped his thoughts. "I really don't remember too much about the last few weeks. Lewis explained a lot of it to me and I'm starting to remember bits and pieces, but it's still pretty blurry. Rikki," Zane looked deep in her eyes. "Whatever I've done, I'm sorry. I'll fix it."

Rikki looked back at Zane. She believed his words, but she couldn't erase the memories of the fear in his eyes when he'd seen her at the

moon pool. It seemed to be etched permanently behind her eyes.

"Talk to me." Zane said eagerly. "Please, tell me what I've done to make you so upset with me. I love you."

Rikki didn't know what to say. She didn't want to make Zane feel bad, not this soon onto his recovery. She knew that the person she'd been spending time with over the last two weeks hadn't been Zane, not really. But still, looking at him now brought up so many different emotions.

"We can talk about it later." She said quietly.

Zane reached up without warning and pulled Rikki's face to his, kissing her hard. It felt so good to have her lips against his. He felt all of his worries fade away as he twisted his fingers in her hair. He released the kiss a few seconds later, reluctantly.

"I need to go." Rikki said abruptly, brushing a tear off her cheek before Zane could see it.

"Now?" Zane pleaded. "Rikki, stay with me."

Rikki was relieved to see Cleo, Bella, Lewis, and Will peaking into the room. "I'll let you catch up with everyone else." She said as she headed toward the door.

"Please, don't go." Zane tried to make her stop, but Rikki breezed out the door before he could convince her to stay.

The group watched Rikki as she dashed down the hall. Cleo started to run after her, but Lewis caught her arm, stopping her.

"Just give her a moment." He said calmly. "This is a lot to take in."

Cleo nodded before pushing open the door to Zane's room and leading the group inside.

Zane's face lit up as the familiar faces walked inside. The group spent an hour catching up, sharing stories, and laughing with one another. Everyone was careful to avoid mentioning Rikki, and whenever the conversation veered towards her they carefully steered it in another direction.

After a bit, Zane began to notice that no one wanted to talk about Rikki, but he tried not to think about it. He had a sinking suspicion that there was a lot more to the last couple weeks than what Lewis had told him so far.

Zane began to feel tired as the time passed. As if on cue, the nurse came bustling into the room. She told the group that they would need to leave so that Zane could get some sleep. They each said their goodbyes and promised to visit the next day.

"When will I be able to go home?" Zane asked before the nurse left.

"You'll have an evaluation later on this evening, but things are looking good." The nurse smiled. "Hopefully we'll have you out of

here soon."

Zane lay back in his bed. More and more memories were starting to form in his head, and he wasn't enjoying any of them.

19. A new couple

Zane's memories returned to him at a steady rate during the rest of that day, and he felt worse and worse as they did. He wasn't just remembering images anymore, he was remembering feelings. He remembered waking up in the hospital, and (now this was weird) he remembered not remembering things. It was as if he was waking up from a dream. He was remembering the events that took place after the accident, but it didn't feel like any of it had really happened to him at all.

"Please," Zane pleaded with the nurse for the third time. "I feel absolutely fine. I need to go home, now."

"Mr. Bennett," The nurse spoke in a voice that was stern, though not unkind. "You've suffered trauma to the head, your thoughts are clouded. This is more serious than you think it is. You are not going anywhere until your head has leveled out."

Zane sank down into his pillows, frustrated and upset. He took a couple of deep breaths to calm himself. He knew that acting agitated wouldn't help get him released any sooner.

Zane reached for his phone and dialed Rikki's number for what felt like the thousandth time. This time it didn't even ring. Zane hung up before Rikki's voicemail message had ended. He had already left her several messages, one after every memory that had surfaced. She had hadn't answered.

Zane rubbed his forehead. He couldn't imagine feeling any worse that he did at that moment. He had really hurt Rikki. His Rikki. He'd been cruel to her, and he'd let her down in a big way.

Zane understood now why Rikki had left the hospital in such a rush. Each time Zane thought about his reaction to discovering Rikki's secret he felt sick with himself. He had been so disgusted, so scared. But now everything was back. All he wanted was Rikki. He didn't care if she was a mermaid, human, or android. He just wanted Rikki back.

Zane took a moment to remember his shock at seeing the photographs of Rikki as a mermaid. He remembered his feelings of horror, which surprised him slightly. Zane thought back, a couple years, to when he'd first found out. He had never felt disgusted by the fact of Rikki being a mermaid.

The very first day that Zane had learned the secret he was surprised, of course, but he had composed himself quickly. He had actually saved Cleo, Rikki, and Emma from a scientist who was holding them captive. He had believed that Rikki had lost her powers after that day. The day he had learned that Rikki was still a mermaid he couldn't have cared less. In fact, he had thought that she looked so stunning there in the moon pool. So... elegant in the water. The most prominent thought in his mind had been how much he loved her, no matter what.

He wouldn't have cared if she had been part garden gnome, he loved her the way she was.

Zane reluctantly thought back to the day, not so long ago, when he had awoken in a hospital bed to see Rikki sound asleep beside him. He deeply regretted his reaction. At the time, all he knew was that he was waking up from an uncomfortable hospital bed. He knew he was in a lot of pain, and he knew that some strange girl was way too close to him.

Picturing the hurt in Rikki's eyes made Zane's heart ache. He closed his eyes tiredly as he tried to erase the images that he had been trying so hard to remember.

Nurse Kay fussed her way into the room at that moment. She paused, taking a hard look at Zane. "Are you alright, Mr. Bennett?" She asked concernedly.

Zane looked up at the nurse through bleary eyes. "I'm fine." He said weakly. "Just tired."

"Ah." Nurse Kay said in a clipped tone. Well how about a little something to help you sleep?"

Without waiting for an answer, Nurse Kay quickly filled a syringe with clear liquid and made her way for Zane's IV.

Zane didn't even try to stop her. At that moment falling asleep sounded like the best thing he could think of. He couldn't bear the memory of how terribly he had hurt Rikki.

Even with the medication, Zane's sleep was fitful, full of nothing but tossing and turning.

Rikki didn't exactly know why she had run out of the hospital. She knew how she should be feeling right now. She should be ecstatic. Zane's memories had returned. She should be wrapped in his arms, happier than she'd been in weeks. But somehow, her happiness was discolored.

Rikki sat on the floor of the moon pool, holding her knees tightly to her chest. She told herself to get up, hurry back to the hospital, and get back to Zane, but she just couldn't.

The past few weeks had been so emotionally taxing on her. All the back and forth, worrying for Zane to remember her, breaking up with him, all the stress...

Rikki sighed, trying to calm herself down and think rationally.

"Ok, Rikki." She spoke to herself out loud. "Zane is back. He remembers. It's exactly what you wanted. Why aren't you happier?"

She didn't have an answer for herself.

"Rikki?" A familiar voice echoed through the cave.

Rikki spun around quickly, surprised.

Lewis stepped into the cavern hesitantly. "What are you doing here?" He asked confusedly. "Zane's been asking for you since you left. He's dying to see you."

"I just needed to think." Rikki said quietly.

"Think?" Lewis shoved his hands in his pockets and raised his eyebrows. "What is there to think about? Everything is back to normal? Rikki," Lewis sat on the sand beside her. "Zane loves you."

"He does now." Rikki said sullenly.

"Come on, he always did." Lewis said firmly. "He just... forgot for a while. You can't blame him for that-"

"I know I can't." Rikki cut Lewis off. "It isn't his fault he got hurt, I'm not trying to blame him for anything. It's just..." She trailed off.

Lewis waited a few seconds before prompting her. "Just what?"

Rikki took a few seconds to compose her thoughts before speaking them out loud. "I can't look at him the same way I used to." She said hesitantly.

"What do you mean?" Lewis asked.

"The way he spoke to me, the way he looked at me when he'd lost his memory-" Rikki paused.

"That's not fair." Lewis shook his head. "That wasn't really him, Rikki."

"Yes it was." Rikki looked Lewis dead in the eye. "It was really him. It was the him that he would have been if we hadn't fallen in love."

"But you did fall in love." Lewis said, confused.

"I know." Rikki kicked the sand. "I'm not making any sense."

"No, you're not." Lewis agreed.

"I'm just not ready to talk to him yet." Rikki said. "I need to try to put the last two weeks behind us. Get back to where we were before the accident."

"Ok." Lewis nodded, still not sure why Rikki wasn't ecstatic. "Well, I'll leave you to it then."

With that, Lewis stood and walked out of the cave. He didn't know what to say to Rikki because he didn't understand what she was thinking. He decided just to give her the space she wanted.

Rikki stayed at the moon pool for another couple hours before heading back home. She called Cleo and Bella to get an update on Zane and let them know where she was. They told her the same thing that Lewis had. Zane had been asking for her. Rikki let herself in her front door and fell tiredly on her bed. She managed to fall asleep, but not

quickly.

The next morning couldn't come soon enough for Zane. He'd been checked over by the doctor and had been cleared to go home. He was anxiously waiting for his father to finish filling out the final paperwork so that he could get out of there and find Rikki. She was all he had been able to think about. He was determined to make her talk to him.

"That's done." Harrison slipped his copy of the hospital paperwork into his briefcase and snapped it shut before looking towards Zane. "Ready to get out of here?"

"Yes." Zane said anxiously as he stood out of the bed.

"You're feeling alright?" Harrison looked at Zane closely.

"Fine." Zane said as he pulled on a light jacket. "I need to get going." Zane started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Harrison called after him.

"To find Rikki." Zane shouted back as he hurried out of the hospital. He rushed to his boat and powered it towards Mako island. He was sure Rikki would be out there, that's where she liked to go when she needed to think.

Zane ran into the cavern expecting to see Rikki's familiar blonde hair. Cleo and Bella looked up in surprise as Zane burst into the cave.

"What are you doing here?" Bella asked.

"Oh, it's you two." Zane said, disappointed.

"Thanks, Zane. Good to see you too." Cleo said sarcastically.

"Sorry," Zane said distractedly. "Have either of you seen Rikki?"

"I spoke to her earlier." Cleo offered. "She said she had some errands to run."

"Can I borrow your phone?" Zane asked hurriedly. "She won't answer when I call on mine."

"I don't have it, Zane." Cleo gestured to her fin. "It wouldn't make it in the water."

"I knew that." Zane nodded. Of course Cleo didn't have her phone. "Ok. I'll see you two later." Zane turned and ran back out of the moon pool.

Bella and Cleo exchanged looks as Zane left.

"What's gotten into him?" Bella asked.

Cleo shrugged. "I don't know, but hopefully he'll find Rikki."

Rikki was sitting in her bedroom at her desk when she heard a knock

on the front door. She looked up from the article she'd been reading and peaked out the window. Her heart stopped when she saw Zane waiting on the front step.

Rikki sat back down determinedly. She wasn't ready to talk to him yet. She would pretend she wasn't home.

After a few minutes of silence Rikki peaked back through the window. Zane was gone. Rikki sighed with relief as she turned back to her desk. She froze as she saw a figure move in the corner of her eye. Rikki spun around to face her bedroom door.

Zane stood in the doorway, looking at Rikki intensely.

"You haven't been answering my calls." He said quietly.

Rikki composed herself quickly. "No, I haven't."

Zane stepped into the bedroom. "Rikki, I remember. I remember everything."

"Everything?" Rikki said carefully.

Zane moved closer to her. "Everything." He repeated. He looked deep into Rikki's eyes. "I love you. Everything about you. And I am so, so very sorry for the way I've treated you lately. Please say you'll forgive me." Zane waited anxiously for Rikki's response.

"Zane..." Rikki started to speak but paused.

"Please, Rikki." Zane took her hands gently in his. "We can get through this."

Rikki looked at Zane quietly. "I don't know, Zane. It's just-"

Zane couldn't wait any longer. He took Rikki's face in his hand and pulled her face roughly to his. He kissed her hard, and after a few seconds Rikki felt herself relaxing into it. The pair held each other tightly, letting their hands run up and down each other's backs.

Rikki melted at Zane's kiss. She tried to make herself stop and take things slowly, but she couldn't. All worries about how Zane really felt about her flew from her mind as she let herself fall further in love with Zane.

Zane broke the kiss and pulled back just far enough to look closely at Rikki. "I love you." He said firmly.

"And I love you." Rikki felt a tear roll down her cheek as she spoke.

The pair broke into huge smiles as they looked at one another. It was as if they were a brand new couple.

The relief Zane felt was almost tangible. He leaned in to whisper into Rikki's ear. "Come with me."

Rikki followed Zane shyly. He led her out the door and down the path towards the ocean.

20. Conclusion

Zane led Rikki to the dock where his boat was tied. He turned back to face her, an eager look of excitement on his face. "Meet me at Mako?" He whispered, pulling Rikki close to him.

Rikki nodded, unable to stop her face from spreading into a smile.

Zane nodded out over the water. "Go ahead. I'm right behind you."

Rikki hesitated slightly before she dove into the water. She surfaced quickly and turned to face Zane, anxious to see his reaction to seeing her as a mermaid.

Zane didn't disappoint her this time. He crouched at the edge of the dock, unable to look away from Rikki. "You're perfect." He said, just loudly enough for Rikki to hear him.

Rikki blushed crimson as she looked up at her boyfriend. She turned and began powering herself through the water towards the familiar island.

Zane watched as Rikki swam away. His mind was awash with memories of how much he loved her. Everything about her. Zane double checked his pants pocket before climbing into his boat and steering it out towards the distant island.

Lewis dialed Zane's number and waited impatiently for Zane to answer.

"Lewis?" Zane slowed the boat enough to hear the voice on the other line.

"I got the rest of it finished, just like you wanted it. Everything is ready." Lewis grinned. "Are you?"

"Totally." Zane said confidently. "Thanks, Lewis."

"Good luck, mate." Lewis said encouragingly.

"Thanks." Zane hung up the phone, glad to have gotten some last minute encouragement from his close friend.

Rikki swam into the moon cavern and looked around in wonder.

Blue sheets, the same color as her eyes, were draped around the cavern. They rippled, almost like the ocean. They were hung all over the walls of the cave, almost making it look as if the whole cavern was covered in water.

Delicate white candles were spread out around the edge of the pool in a circle, except for a path that had been left clear. Their flames flickered, adding to the oceanic atmosphere of the cave.

Rikki pulled herself out of the water, careful to avoid the candles, and dried herself off.

A CD player was set up on a small table on the far corner of the cave. Rikki walked over to it and was just about to turn it on when Zane came jogging in.

"Hey." He sounded breathless as he gazed at her.

"What is all this?" Rikki gestured to the decorated cavern.

"I wanted to do something special." Zane looked completely focused as he walked to stand right in front of Rikki. He looked deep into her eyes and reached up to cup her face in his hands. He leaned in and kissed her softly at first, but the kiss quickly intensified.

Rikki smiled as the kiss ended. She leaned her forehead against Zane's chest. for the first time, Rikki noticed what Zane was wearing. She took a step back and looked at him up and down.

Zane was standing there in a pair of dark blue jeans, a very familiar maroon shirt, and the gray jacket that Rikki had given him so long ago.

"You're wearing the clothes I picked out for you." Rikki murmured.

Zane looked at himself. "I guess you're right." He said with a small laugh. "I didn't even think about it."

Rikki nodded. "And what's that?" She nodded towards the CD player.

"In a minute." Zane sat down on the cool sand and gestured for Rikki to join him, which she did.

"I have to tell you something." Zane said quietly. "These last few weeks, without you in my life, were the worst weeks of my life."

"Zane, you don't have to say anything about it. We can just move on." Rikki tried to soothe him.

"No." Zane said firmly. "I can't just move on. Rikki, you are everything to me. I didn't start really living life until I met you. Before you, I was... well, I wasn't a very good person. And I'm still not a very good person, but I'll work forever to be good enough to deserve you. If you'll let me."

Rikki had never heard Zane be quite so honest with her before. She looked closely at him, searching for the right words.

"I'm sorry." Zane said seriously. "For everything. I'm sorry I treated you so terribly, I'm sorry I made you feel bad for being what you are, and," The corner of Zane's mouth twitched. "I'm sorry I made you miss the summer dance."

Zane stood and quickly switched on the stereo. A familiar piece of music filled the air of the cave. Zane walked back to where Rikki was sitting and extended a hand to her. "May I have this dance?"

Rikki accepted Zane's hand with a smile on her face. A month ago, a

gesture this mushy would have made her laugh, but after dealing with all of the drama lately she was just glad to be spending time with the real Zane. The Zane that she loved.

Zane held Rikki close to him as they danced to the slow song. Track after track played on the CD player, but neither Rikki nor Zane really noticed the music. After several songs had gone by Zane stepped back from Rikki.

"Get in." Zane couldn't keep the excitement out of his voice.

"What?" Rikki's head tilted to one side.

"Get in the water." Zane nodded encouragingly.

"Why?" Rikki didn't want the moment to end.

"Just humor me." Zane nodded towards the pool.

"Alright..." Rikki said hesitantly. She dove into the pool.

Zane checked his pocket a final time as she surfaced.

"What is it?" Rikki rested her arms on the side of the pool as she looked up at Zane.

Slowly, not wanting to rush anything, Zane layed down on his stomach at the edge of the pool, his face only a few inches away from Rikki's. It was a familiar position for them. They'd spent hours at Mako together, Rikki in the water and Zane on the land. Zane let his head rest comfortably in his hands. He leaned in, as he had several times before, and kissed Rikki softly before propping himself up on his elbows.

Rikki couldn't imagine what in the world Zane was up to, but she wasn't about to complain.

Zane reached one hand into his pocket and brought out a familiar black velvet box. He held it for a few seconds, out of Rikki's sight, before bringing it out into the open.

"Zane, what is that?" Rikki breathed, unable to look away from the box.

"It's yours, if you'll have it." Zane opened the box slowly, revealing the delicate ring inside. "If you'll have me."

Tears welled in Rikki's eyes. For the first time in what seemed like forever, they were tears of pure joy. "Yes." she whispered.

Zane had to blink tears from his own eyes as a wash of relief flowed over him. "Yes?" He repeated.

"Yes!" Rikki hugged Zane tightly around the neck and pulled him into the water with her. They spent several seconds wrapped in each other's arms, there in the water. Neither of them wanted to break their kiss, but eventually they allowed themselves to separate.

Zane slid the ring onto the fourth finger of Rikki's left hand. They

looked at it in silence for a while, both relishing what was a truly perfect moment.

"You and me?" Zane smiled. "You think you can put up with me for the rest of our lives?"

Rikki smiled back. "I think I can't wait to get started."

After that, the only sound was of the water crashing in the ocean. Rikki and Zane found themselves too busy for words.

* * *

><p>I'm so sad to see this one end, it's been so much fun to write! Thanks so much for all of the reviews and encouragement! :)<p>

21. Sequel: Relapse

Hello!

Just letting everyone know that the sequel to 'Wiped Out' is coming out now! It's called 'Relapse' and it takes place right where 'Wiped out' leaves off.

Zane isn't healing the way he should be. He keeps having amnesiac flashes where he doesn't remember anything. Usually the flashes only last for a few seconds, but sometimes they last for much longer.

At first Rikki thinks she can handle it, taking careful close of Zane. But how long can she handle it? How many times will she have to remind Zane who she is? And what happens when he loses his memory and finds out what she is at the worst possible moment? Will he still keep her secret?

I hope you all enjoy the sequel. Please feel free to give me your honest opinion.

thanks!

S.

End
file.